MARCH 24, 2003

Kenneth Pollack's War · Ian S. Lustick

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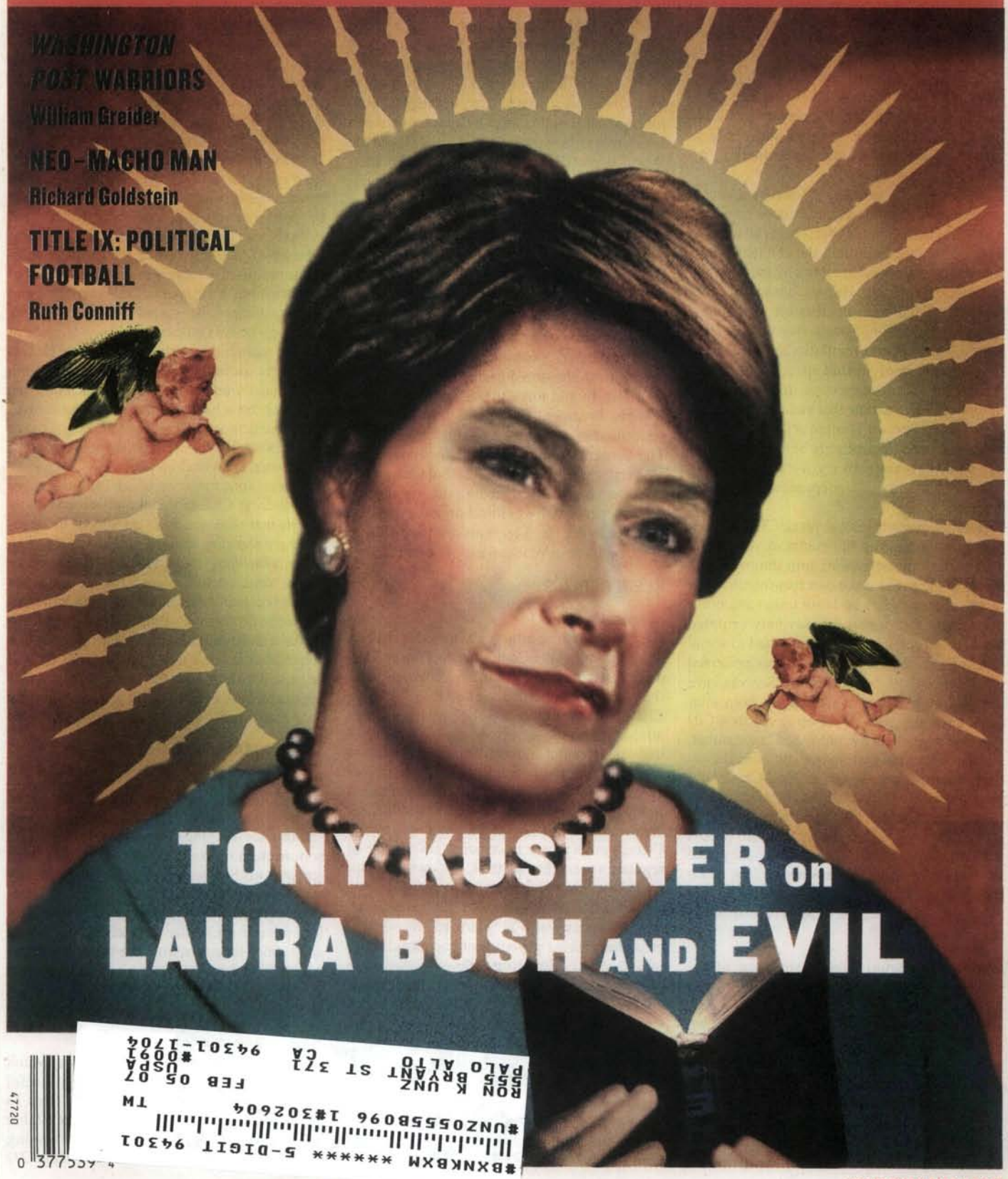

WASHINGTON POST WARRIORS
William Greider

NEO-MACHO MAN
Richard Goldstein

TITLE IX: POLITICAL FOOTBALL
Ruth Conniff

TONY KUSHNER on LAURA BUSH AND EVIL

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LETTERS

VENEZUELA'S CLASS WARFARE

New York City

■ Although we commend Naomi Klein for writing about the struggle between the Venezuelan government and the private media, in her March 3 "Lookout" column, she misrepresented the position of the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ).

While we do not dispute the Venezuelan government's right to regulate public airwaves, and while we recognize that serious allegations have been made regarding the conduct of private media, we object to efforts by the administration of President Hugo Chávez to apply regulations that are inconsistent with international standards of press freedom. For example, some of the regulations that Chávez is seeking to apply forbid speech that incites "rebellion and disrespect of institutions and its authorities," a statute that violates the American Convention on Human Rights. Furthermore, the investigations are being carried out in a punitive manner by a government agency whose impartiality and independence are highly suspect.

During the past several years, CPJ has been carefully monitoring the media in Venezuela. The current investigations into the broadcast media come in the wake of a two-month strike by the country's largest labor union and other opposition forces that has severely crippled Venezuela's economy and contributed to social unrest there. We realize that in this polarized environment both private and state media have dropped all pretense of objectivity from their news coverage. And as we observed in a CPJ report, *Cannon Fodder*, published last summer, we are concerned that journalists—caught between the private media owners' anti-Chávez objectives and Chávez's charged rhetoric criticizing the press—are not being allowed to do their jobs. The result is that the Venezuelan people are being deprived of the information they need to make informed decisions about their country's political future. JOEL SIMON

Committee to Protect Journalists

Wilmington, Vt.

■ Although Naomi Klein's appraisal of the power of the Venezuelan media and Gustavo Cisneros is on target, I must say that the Venezuelan process has created a third current, which holds enormous promise. The head of the National Confederation of Workers, the soon-to-be-arrested Carlos Ortega, since his bitter experience with the fleeting President Carmona, has forged a forward-looking alliance with the recently arrested president of Fedecamaras, Carlos Fernandez. Among the chief points of their "governability agreement" are the inclusion of all Venezuelans in a truly democratic system and a policy of wealth redistribution.

Let there be no mistake. The situation in Venezuela today comes from decades of mismanagement, aggravated by market-oriented measures taken at the behest of the IMF and the World Bank. Chávez—"democratically elected," as Klein calls him—won because of popular disgust with the system. He obtained 56 percent of 40 percent of the electorate. At this time, his legitimacy is severely compromised, since millions of Venezuelans have signed petitions for new elections. His government has now resorted to the arrest of opposition leaders for acting as allowed by Chávez's own Constitution. And recently three military dissenters were murdered, execution-style, possibly by government-sponsored death squads.

Klein should join OAS Secretary General Gaviria, President Carter and the Venezuelan opposition in calling for free and fair elections. The Venezuelan media, especially Venevisión, are very powerful and sectarian, but Chávez has his own control over media and has put together an impressive political organization. Let the people decide. Elections are the solution to the problem in Venezuela. PEDRO PEREIRA

KLEIN REPLIES

Buenos Aires

■ In fact it is Joel Simon, in his letter, who is misrepresenting the Committee to Protect Journalists' stated positions on the Venezuela conflict. Here he claims that the CPJ respects Hugo Chávez's right to regulate the press and is opposed only to the aspects of the proposed law that would restrict criticism of public officials—the same position I took in my column. However, in its other statements, the CPJ has made no such distinctions and has instead issued blanket condemnations of any and all attempts by the Chávez government to criticize, investigate or regulate a press that, by the CPJ's own account, has "dropped all pretense of objectivity."

For instance, in its January 23 "news alert," the CPJ states that it is "alarmed" merely because the Chávez government had launched an investigation of two private television stations to see if they had violated existing broadcast standards. In past statements the CPJ has condemned Chávez for openly criticizing the press, on the grounds that such criticism led to violent attacks on journalists by his supporters. I agree that Chávez has not done enough to condemn such violence, but the CPJ has not done nearly enough to condemn the more recent wave of arrests and beatings of pro-Chávez journalists working at community radio and television. These well-documented incidents are given only the most cursory mention in the *Cannon Fodder* report, with no quotes from those affected by the violence. It doesn't help the CPJ's credibility when Simon describes the recent general strike as being organized "by the country's largest labor union and other opposition forces." Please. Those nameless "other forces" were the managers of the national oil company and the largest business association in the country.

With that in mind, I'm afraid I can't join Pedro Pereira in his appraisal of Carlos Ortega as a leader of "a third current, which holds enormous promise." Ortega was not just a leader of the strike but a key part of the corporate and military alliance that staged the April 12 coup. Although he was pushed out of the alliance at the last moment, that was only because he was no longer useful: The goal of making it seem that regular workers were behind the coup had already been achieved. He may now be in favor of a more democratic means of pushing Chávez from power, but let's remember that elections, for Ortega, are a backup plan.

There is one matter on which I strongly agree with Pereira: Chávez's commitment to democracy is now also deeply in question. His opponents are showing up dead, and he is proposing a media law that would make it illegal to make such a "disrespectful" point in the press. Chávez is clearly at a crossroads: Will he recommit himself to the democratic values that brought him to power and the radical participatory process that created Venezuela's new Constitution? Or will he lapse into the kind of authoritarianism that his opponents have been trying to provoke from day one? Stay tuned. NAOMI KLEIN

THE TAXMAN COMETH...

Kingston, NY

■ Re "Long Live the Estate Tax!" by Bill Gates Sr. and Chuck Collins [Jan. 27]: One of the good reasons for keeping the estate tax is that the superrich, to avoid paying it, donate vast amounts to charities rather than have the money taxed and put to some undetermined use. Besides, they get hospital wings, museums and college prizes named after themselves and respect and acknowledgment from the benefiting institutions. To get that respect from the government, you have to buy legislators, which, sadly, is not tax-deductible! HENRY LOWENGARD

Havertown, Pa.

■ The estate tax is a blunt instrument, which should be reformed if it is to serve a useful social purpose. If encouraging donations to charity is the objective, replace the charitable deduction with a charitable credit. Knowing

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EDITORIALS

Dissent and Disconnects

History was made on February 27 when for the first time Big Labor formally broke with a sitting President's war policy. By unanimous vote, the executive council of the AFL-CIO, representing America's 13 million unionized workers, approved a resolution stating, "The president has not fulfilled his responsibility to make a compelling and coherent explanation to the American people and the world about the need for military action against Iraq at this time."

Labor's enlistment into the cause of peace came as thousands of Americans jammed fax and phone lines in a "Virtual March on Washington," and as college and high school students planned a March 5 event that saw walkouts of classes across the country. The list of cities, including most recently Los Angeles, that have gone on record against the war now numbers more than a hundred. Resistance to the drive for war also stiffened in Europe, where—even after its government was offered what amounted to a multibillion-dollar bribe, the Turkish Parliament voted to prohibit US troops from using its soil as a staging area. In Paris the foreign ministers of France, Germany and Russia said they would "not allow" passage of a United Nations Security Council resolution that would be used as an authorization for war.

George W. Bush, however, seems unfazed. As Iraq was complying with UN inspectors' demands to destroy its Al Samoud missiles, he went on national TV to ratchet up the war rhetoric. In an updated version of the White Man's Burden, Bush shifted his rationale for war away from disarmament and argued that it is the moral duty of America to liberate Iraq and usher in a new era of regional democracy—albeit at gunpoint. Meanwhile, attempting to secure the fig leaf of UN approval for its war plans by any means necessary, the Administration went so far as to deploy a massive surveillance and phone-tap scheme, spying on UN diplomats from countries whose votes are needed.

Despite such behavior, Congress remains, for the most part, a mute bystander. One exception is a lawsuit brought by a dozen members, along with serving soldiers and parents of troops, that seeks to bar the President from ordering an attack on Iraq without a Congressional declaration of war. After being dismissed by a lower court, the suit was given respectful attention by a three-judge appeals court panel in Boston, which heard oral arguments on March 4 and asked for briefs in the case. In the Senate, senior Democrats Robert Byrd and Edward Kennedy have sponsored resolutions that call on the Administration to continue support of UN weapons inspections and express the sense of the Senate that the President must return to Congress for a second vote before initiating the use of force. In the House, legislation sponsored by Democrat Peter DeFazio and Republican Ron Paul to repeal last October's authorization of force has attracted thirty-five co-sponsors. Elsewhere on the political landscape, former Vermont Governor Howard Dean and Congressman Dennis Kucinich are finding support for their presidential peace candidacies.

While none of the Congressional initiatives have received much public attention, the bum economy, stagnating in part because of investors' war jitters, has caught the attention of just about everyone. No surprise, then, that support for Bush's 2004 election has fallen below 50 percent for the first time. That Bush's presidency could face the same end as his father's is little recompense for the damage this war would wreak on democratic principles.

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COMMENT

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Caldron in Northern Iraq

Erbil, northern Iraq

Northern, "free" Iraq looks more and more like Lebanon in the old days: venue of not one war but many. It should have been so simple. The US armed forces were to land in Turkey and base themselves in friendly Iraqi Kurdistan on their way south in Operation Impose Democracy. Democracy in Turkey, however, intervened, to close the Turkish road to Iraq. Meanwhile, Turkey's real rulers—the army command, Kurd killers as much as Saddam—intend to invade Iraq themselves. That will add at least one extra war to the impending chaos.

Does the United States need a northern front to crush Saddam's feeble army? Probably not. I met an Iraqi Army deserter here who said that only four tanks in his unit of twenty-eight actually work. Other deserters, many debriefed by US officers here, report that most soldiers want only to surrender. The United States wanted a northern front less than it needed another accomplice, Turkey, in its globally unpopular war on Iraq. But if it joins the coalition, Turkey will not fight Saddam Hussein. It will fight Iraq's Kurds.

With 90 percent of its population opposed to the war, Turkey's government demanded a payoff. America and Johnny Turk haggled over money, but the Turkish military wanted a little more: a piece of Iraq. The United States, as prospective liberator, was willing to hand it over. Zalmay Khalilzad, George W. Bush's slow learner at the poker table of Iraqi politics, assured skeptics at the recent Iraqi opposition conference here that Turkey would invade only as part of the US coalition. Turkey's insistence, however, that its army would not fight Saddam undercut its commitment to a coalition whose purpose was to do just that. Meanwhile, Turkey's generals and foreign minister contradicted Khalilzad: Their troops would enter Iraq flying the Turkish flag, obeying Turkish commanders and seeking Turkish objectives.

"If their intention is not to fight Saddam Hussein, it is to demolish our experience here," an angry Massoud Barzani, leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party, told me. "The Kurds would use all means at their disposal to stop the Turks. So would the rest of the Iraqis." He thought the Turks would attempt "to disarm the Kurds. They want to deny the Kurds a state. They want to end the status quo under which we have governed ourselves. They don't want the Kurds to have Kirkuk or Mosul." On this occasion he speaks for popular opinion here. No Kurd that I have met accepts any Turkish presence, in or outside a US coalition. Businessmen, taxi drivers, teachers and students have told me they would join the fight against the Turks. Men who had not volunteered for the battle against Saddam are buying new uniforms and rifles.

A Turkish occupation of Iraqi Kurdistan could divert the American army into the role of peacekeeper between its Kurdish and Turkish allies. Whose side would the US "coalition" favor? The Kurds, whom they are ostensibly liberating from Saddam; or the powerful and usually loyal Turks? If US forces end up protecting the Turks from Iraqi Kurdish guerrillas, Turkish propaganda will undoubtedly call the Kurdish resistance terrorism. Bush may draw on his rich vocabulary of euphemisms to explain to American soldiers that they must kill the people they came to set free.

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COMMENT

In 1939, when France and Britain sought the neutrality of Turkey's military, much of which sympathized with Germany, they found that money was not enough. So France cut off a piece of Syria and handed it to Turkey. Turkey renamed Alexandretta the Turkish province of Hatay, forced all its inhabitants to replace their Arab names with Turkish ones and banned the teaching of their native language. Alexandretta belongs to Turkey to this day. The Kurds, as well as Arab members of the Iraqi opposition, do not want the same to happen to a slice of Iraq.

In his definitive account of the Kurds' tormented modern history, Jonathan Randal refers to Kurdish nationalism as a "disease that was considered highly contagious and thus especially suspect to the largely centralized states they [Turks, Iranians and Iraqis] were then forging in the West's modernizing image." In each country, America—champion of self-determination—helped the Shah, the Turkish Army and Saddam to deny Kurds a country of their own. Now Bush is going a step further and helping to deny them even limited autonomy within a new Iraq. Oh, brave new war.

I should say, wars. Turkish intervention anywhere near Kirkuk will prompt an Iranian response. The United States should remember that its plan for Lebanon was undone by Iran's Shiite Muslim surrogates of the Hezbollah in 1983 when they destroyed the US Embassy and Marine headquarters in Beirut. Iran has far more Shiite surrogates in Iraq—about 60 percent of the population—than it ever did in Lebanon. And there will be the inevitable sideshows: Turkey versus the Turkish-Kurd commandos of the old PKK who are hiding here, Iran versus its exiled Mujahedeen al-Khalq, America and some Kurds versus the fundamentalists of Ansar al-Islam and, possibly, America versus Iran. If I leave a few out, these are early days. CHARLES GLASS

Charles Glass, ABC News correspondent in northern Iraq, covered the Kurdish rebellion there in 1991.

Rising Danger in Korea

If the impending invasion of Iraq goes quickly and Saddam Hussein is overthrown, North Korea will soon enter American gun sights. For the past three months Pyongyang has sought to get Washington's attention with a series of provocative moves, but the Bush Administration has so far succeeded in dragging its feet and delaying a serious response. The stage is thus set for Bush to deal with the "axis of evil" serially: first Iraq, then North Korea, then Iran. Unfortunately for Bush, however, he also faces a crisis with our South Korean ally, now led by people who seek to bring the destiny of their country under their own control.

In December the South Korean people broke decisively with the existing political system, and the elites within it who date back to the Korean War, by electing Roh Moo Hyun. Roh is a lawyer who came up the hard way: Born into a dirt-poor family that could not afford college, he schooled himself in the law and passed Korea's notoriously difficult bar exam on his first try. In the 1980s, during the Reagan-supported dictatorship of Chun Doo Hwan, Roh defended many human rights and labor activists at the risk of his own career and life. Amazingly, for presumably anti-Communist South Korea, his wife comes from a family that was blacklisted for decades: Her father was a member of the South Korean Labor Party in the late 1940s, a Communist party outlawed by the US Military Government that ruled the South then; he was arrested for allegedly collaborating with the North during the Korean War, and died in jail. Roh's sharpest break with the past, though, is his constituency. His election was boosted mightily by a burgeoning movement among younger Koreans against the seemingly endless American military presence in the South, conducted in successive, truly massive and dignified candlelight processions along the grand boulevard in front of the US Embassy in Seoul. Routinely labeled "anti-American" by the media, these demonstrations were in fact anti-Bush—like so many others.

Since his election Roh has made clear his dissatisfaction with Bush's policies toward the North and his desire to solve the nuclear problem through dialogue; as a consequence, initial meetings between his advance team and Bush officials last month did not go well. According to Howard French of the *New York Times*, insiders termed the visit "a near disaster." One American participant told the *Times*, "I sense major trouble ahead in the relationship. The impression I got is that for Roh and his generation, the ultimate goal is to reunite their country and get us off the peninsula." Korean participants in these meetings, however, thought this American reaction arose from a particular exchange: When asked what would happen if the United States unilaterally took out the North's nuclear facilities without consulting Seoul, one of Roh's closest advisers responded, "It would mean the end of the alliance." And why not? What sovereign country allows a global bully to go around starting wars when its people would be the primary victims?

Roh's inauguration on February 25 was a much less festive affair than Kim Dae Jung's five years ago. A somber mood prevailed because of a subway disaster that had killed 198 people the week before, and because of the growing crisis with the North and the rift between Seoul and Washington. The next day I met with President Roh along with twelve other Americans for what was supposed to be a brief congratulatory get-together. Instead, three prominent Americans gathered across the table from Roh and began to lecture him on what was wrong with just about everything he had said about his position vis-à-vis the North. One of them, a former ambassador to Japan, hulked menacingly over the table, his face red and seemingly angered, telling Roh that Americans would never understand his statement that he would "guarantee the security and survival of the North," since the American people found that regime "detestable." Roh responded gently by saying that in solving international problems it was not necessarily the best procedure to begin by name-calling and casting all blame on one's adversary, and abruptly ended the meeting.

Today Bush finds himself managing two very difficult relationships on the Korean peninsula, amid the rapidly building momentum toward war with Iraq. The acute danger in Korea, however, derives from a combination of typical and predictable North Korean cheating and provocation, along with Bush's pre-emptive-strike doctrine and his loathing of Kim Jong Il. Bush seems bent on "regime change" in North Korea, too. Last August he told Bob Woodward that his preference was to "topple" the North Korean regime. According to Seymour Hersh, a participant

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COMMENT

in White House strategy meetings said of Kim Jong Il, "Bush and Cheney want that guy's head on a platter. Don't be distracted by all this talk about negotiations. There will be negotiations, but they have a plan, and they are going to get this guy after Iraq. He's their version of Hitler." The North Koreans follow these stories, of course, and in a highly unusual commentary published in February, the North Korean party newspaper stated that "it is foolish for the US to think that we will sit idle with folded arms to wait until it gives orders for a pre-emptive strike."

In December the North began a virtual replay of the nuclear crisis that the Clinton Administration confronted a decade ago. It again kicked UN inspectors out, castigated the inspectors for being a tool of Washington, announced its withdrawal from the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty and said that any Security Council sanctions would be interpreted as "a declaration of war." It has sent fighter jets ranging into the South's air space and alongside US spy planes. But the North has stopped short of opening up 8,000 plutonium fuel rods that were frozen in a deal with Washington eight years ago, the clearest "red line" that might provoke Bush into a pre-emptive strike at the nuclear facility, and it continues to say that it wants to establish good relations with Washington.

We can expect trouble in the near term because of these grave threats of pre-emption and counter-pre-emption, and because of the chasm between Roh Moo Hyun and Bush over how to deal with North Korea. In the long run, however, the only way to solve this problem is for the United States to return to direct and meaningful talks with Pyongyang. In other words, Roh Moo Hyun's conciliatory position is correct, and he is supported in this position by all the relevant parties: Japan, China, Russia and the European Union. It is only the Bush Administration that is isolated on how to deal with the North Korean nuclear problem. But then Bush is isolated on war with Iraq, too. Those seeking to prevent that war should redouble their efforts, because Iraq appears to presage a series of preventive wars. BRUCE CUMINGS

Bruce Cumings teaches at the University of Chicago. His book Parallax Visions: Making Sense of American–East Asian Relations *has recently appeared in paperback and contains an extended analysis of the first nuclear crisis with North Korea a decade ago.*

CALVIN TRILLIN

The Kurds Are In the Way Again

The Kurds are in the way again,
And so, to our dismay again,
If we begin a fray again,
As it appears we may again,
It seems we must betray again
The Kurds: They're in the way again.

Washington Post *Warriors*

A generation ago, when I worked at the *Washington Post*, the right-wing fringe occasionally referred to us as "*Pravda* on the Potomac." We reporters were amused but also rankled. We did not see ourselves as a mouthpiece for the government (neither, it seems, did the government). Still, the slur had a whiff of truth. Washington is a company town and has its own corps of Kremlinologists who read the *Post* closely every day for half-hidden clues to official intentions. Whether the newspaper gets things right or wrong, its version of reality will inevitably color everyone's political calculations. During the hard going in Vietnam, Lyndon Johnson confided to the editorial page editor that the *Post*'s support for the war was worth two divisions.

The *Pravda* allusion takes on ironic resonance now that the right-wingers own the federal government and the *Post*'s divisions are once again deployed for war. Its editorial pages have expressed an over-the-top pre-emptive enthusiasm, arguing the case as repetitiously as Bush and nearly as cockily as Rumsfeld. Its platoon of battle-ready pundits attacks fiercely, with the confidence of small boys playing tin soldiers on Mummy's carpet. Dissenting voices are ridiculed; reluctant allies get the full-battery barrage.

But Kremlinologists have also observed, less obviously, a certain patriotic passivity in the news columns, perhaps inhibited by the heightened emotions of 9/11. Instead of examining the factual basis for targeting Iraq, the *Post* largely framed the story line as a Washington drama of inside baseball. Would Colin Powell hold off the Pentagon hawks and win the President's heart and mind? Will Rumsfeld whip the CIA into line? The problem with insider reporting is that it tends to skip over the obvious, critical questions that the insiders do not wish to address. What exactly does Saddam Hussein have to do with Osama bin Laden or 9/11? Instead of digging into that and a host of other relevant questions, most reporting concentrated on war plans and Saddam's many crimes.

We read numerous accounts of the blitzkrieg strategy Washington is devising for Baghdad, but odd little omissions occurred. When Osama's taped message surfaced recently, the *Post* story neglected to mention that the Al Qaeda leader also denounced Saddam as being among the "infidels." When prominent figures like Bill Clinton's Secretary of State Madeleine Albright or retired Gen. Anthony Zinni dissented from going to war, it was treated as no big deal. Despite some honorable exceptions, major media generally went limp on the march to war. The *Post* went star-spangled.

The shortage of critical challenges from the press (and from intimidated Democrats) assisted the manipulation of public thinking. By relentless repetition, Bush and his team accomplished an audacious feat of propaganda—persuading many Americans to redirect the emotional wounds left by 9/11, their hurt and anger, away from the perpetrators to a different adversary. According to a *New York Times*–CBS News survey, 42 percent now believe Saddam Hussein was personally responsible for the attack on the World Trade Center and Pentagon. In an ABC News poll, 55 percent believe Saddam provides direct support to Al Qaeda. The Iraqi did it, let's go get him. As a bogus rallying cry, "Remember 9/11" ranks with "Remember the Maine" of 1898 for war with

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COMMENT

Spain or the Gulf of Tonkin resolution of 1964 for justifying the US escalation in Vietnam.

In the past month or so, however, my impression (shared by others) is that the *Post*'s news coverage has toughened considerably—beginning to puncture various propaganda claims and to explore contradictions that might better have been examined long ago. The editors and reporters may have been shaken by the unanticipated public outrage, including from their own readers. The newspaper's omissions, distortions and casual disparagement of antiwar protests were prompting waves of e-mail objections. "It is tunnel-vision coverage like yours," one message complained, "that scares off people in mainstream America who are against the war but can't relate to the picture you painted of its opposition."

The *Post*'s ombudsman, former foreign editor Michael Getler, has seconded many of the readers' complaints in his memos to the staff. As millions marched at home and abroad, it became increasingly difficult to attribute the antiwar uproar to what one columnist ridiculed as the "irrelevant left." Indeed, the *Post*'s media critic, Howard Kurtz, discerned a general trend in the media toward more aggressive and skeptical reporting. "It's about time," he wrote. "Whether you're for or against the war, a full-throated debate in the media is overdue." In his usual obsequious manner, Kurtz left out his employer.

The *Post*'s institutional discomfort was confirmed on February 27 in a long, semiconfessional editorial that respectfully acknowledged the angry dissenters and attempted once again to justify the march to war, but with less imperious certainty. The essence of the editorial board's defense was, Hey, the *Post* has always been for invading Iraq and toppling Saddam, so give us credit at least for consistency. Yet the editorial proceeded to repeat Bush's slippery emotional logic. The world is a dangerous place, it reminded, and we will feel better about terrorism if Saddam is taken out. Note the leap of logic in that elision. The editors even cited the anthrax attacks in Florida, New York and Washington. Does this mean they are adding the anthrax letters to the indict-

(Continued on Page 22)

In Fact . . .

THIS IS YOUR BRAIN ON ANTIDRUG.COM ADS

Those antidrug ads—the latest one is on page 33—have poked a hornet's nest of reader protest. As we explained when we published some heated letters (Feb. 10), this magazine's advertising acceptability policy carries a strong free-speech bias; we are against censoring ads whose content we disagree with. And yes, we do disagree with the message of most of the antidrug ads sponsored by the Office of National Drug Control Policy. Our objections are multifold: (1) The ads are a waste of taxpayer dollars ($150 million annually). Surveys have shown that such ads don't achieve their goals and have even turned on some kids. (2) They're defending a bad policy, i.e., the drug war. One ONDCP campaign, launched during the 2002 Super Bowl, harps on the theme that buying drugs supports terrorism. But you could as well argue that the drug war finances terrorism—by driving up prices and profits to such astronomical levels that for every kingpin they catch, ten new ones jump to take their place. The ONDCP campaign emphasizes propaganda against marijuana, a drug less harmful than alcohol that should be decriminalized. (3) The domestic drug war is not only unwinnable, it has exacted a high social cost. It has eroded civil liberties and left the Fourth Amendment in tatters. The $40 billion a year spent on it would be better used for programs that help the poor; it engenders violent crime, plus overburdening the cops with minor dealer-user busts, clogging the courts and packing the prisons; it has jailed a disproportionate number of young African-American males; it has made doctors fearful of prescribing strong narcotics for pain and wrongly criminalized the medical use of marijuana. (4) The failure of US prohibition has led to a disastrous interdiction policy of US interventions in grower countries. Congress has allocated $2 billion to Colombia's antinarcoterrorist campaign, and the Pentagon is stealthily committing more US troops to this brutal war. The vast profits to be made from the US traffic have generated corruption among police and government in the poor grower countries. Here's the truth about drugs: Prohibition, incarceration and interdiction aren't working. Treatment, education and decriminalization work.

'THE HAMMER' STRIKES

Commenting on Howard Dean's loudly applauded antiwar speech at the Democratic National Committee meeting, House majority leader Tom (Hammerhead) DeLay charged that Democrats "are fast becoming the appeasement party of the future." There's a mindless, thuggish quality to DeLay's broadsides (he says Democrats want "unlimited unemployment compensation so somebody could stay out of work for the rest of their lives"), but we must ask: Is he—and the Republican Party for which he is a prominent voice—saying that the 59 percent of Americans who favor giving UN inspectors more time are appeasers? Does he think people who argue against a pre-emptive war that has no relationship to US security concerns are appeasers? And what does he mean by "appeasement party of the future"? Is this Administration already planning more Iraqs? DeLay wants to see democratic debate snuffed out entirely. Still another argument for regime change—in America.

WHAT'S SAUCE FOR SADDAM IS PROPAGANDA

Press Secretary Ari Fleischer slammed Dan Rather's Saddam Hussein interview and warned US networks not to give Iraqis airtime to make unsubstantiated charges: "If it's all lies, why put it on in the first place?" But presumably it's OK to let George W. Bush go on TV and spin such fantasies as the war will create a democratic Iraq and bring Israeli-Palestinian peace, that the Star Wars antimissile defense has been proved to work, that eliminating taxes on stock dividends will stimulate the economy, etc.

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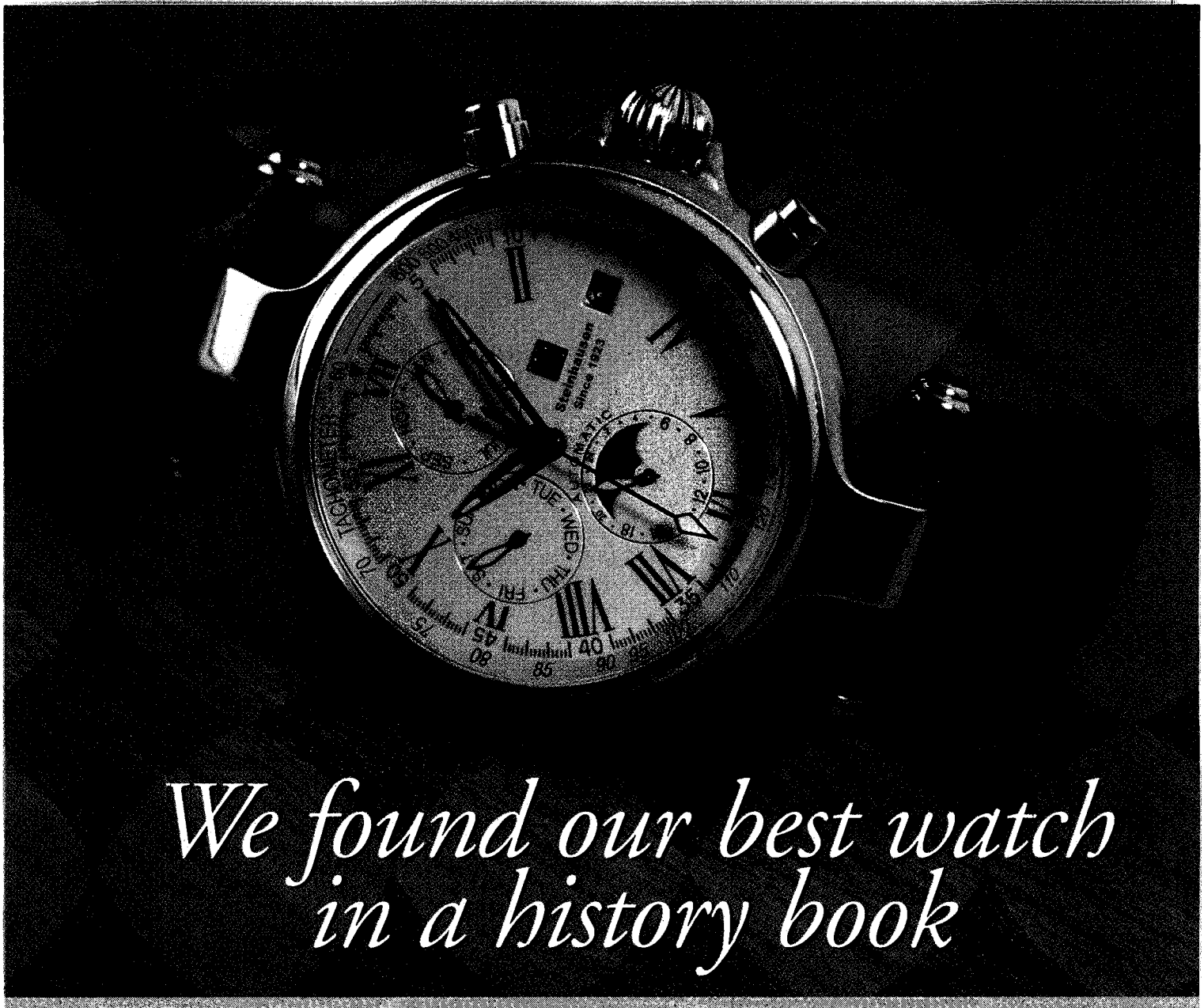

We found our best watch in a history book

In 1923, a small watchmaker in Switzerland designed the first watch to display the day, month, date, and AM/PM. Only 100 of these magnificent timepieces were ever made and this watch was almost lost to history. Today, they are so rare that one original Steinhausen watch can fetch more than $300,000 at auction.

These watches were among the most stylish of the roaring 20's. And yet no one has attempted to remake the Steinhausen of 1923 until now. The watch design that you see here has been painstakingly recreated from the original to please even the most discerning owner. The owner of this classic chronograph watch is sure to look distinguished and set apart from the crowd. From the sweeping second hand to the roman numerals on the unique ivory-colored face, every detail has been carefully reproduced. This reissue is limited to 5000 watches allowing you to wear a watch far more exclusive than a new Rolex, Movado, TAG Heuer or Breitling.

This watch has an automatic mechanical movement, the kind desired by fine watch collectors. We have updated this movement with kinetic power thus the watch never needs batteries and never needs to be wound. The watch comes in a beautiful mahogany toned wood case and comes with both interchangeable black and brown leather bands.

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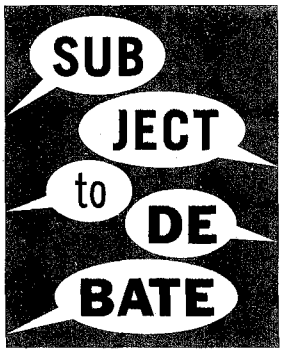
KATHA POLLITT

Phallic Balloons Against the War



Who says there's nothing new under the sun? Monday, March 3, saw the emergence of a new kind of protest against war—the Lysistrata Project. Back in January, two clever and indefatigable New York actresses, Kathryn Blume and Sharron Bower, had the marvelous idea of staging readings of Aristophanes' hilarious and bawdy antiwar protofeminist play, in which the women of Greece, led by the strong, intelligent and fearless Lysistrata, unite to withhold sex from their warrior husbands until they agree to end the Peloponnesian War. Before they knew it, the project had grown to include more than 1,000 readings in 59 countries from China to Argentina. The United States had 700, with 67 in New York City alone.

Ever the enterprising reporter, I passed up numerous opportunities to see the play in wintry parks and outside neoclassical buildings (brrr), on the subway, at Grand Central Station, in bars, libraries and bookstores, and caught a performance at the Barnard College cafeteria, where students offered a high-spirited all-girl reading, complete with balloon phalluses, to their lunching classmates. That night, I saw the all-star version at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, which offered gymnasts, bongo drums, a band and yet more phallic balloons, and featured, among others, Kathleen Chalfant, Kevin Bacon (!) and an unforgettable Mercedes Ruehl as the witty and redoubtable heroine.

How to account for the project's triumphant popularity? As Bower put it at BAM, "Nobody can resist an ancient Greek dick joke." Well, yes, there's that. What a pleasure it was to have fun, vitality, humor and sex on our side, not to mention the literary canon, the glory that was Greece and the majority of the world's population, and leave the other side stuck with Confederate flags, Bible study and bigoted prom queens like Ann Coulter. The Lysistrata Project belongs to something new in political organizing—Internet-fueled grassroots arts activity, in which a master blueprint is quickly adopted and freely adapted at the local level—like last month's antiwar poetry readings and V-Day, a spin on Valentine's Day in which Eve Ensler's *Vagina Monologues* is staged at hundreds of campuses and communities across the globe as a feminist fiesta and fundraiser.

Will any of it make a difference? Bush seems about as deterrable as Godzilla, and by the time you read this the bombs may be raining on Baghdad. But the longer our protests prolong the prewar moment, the more isolated the war party becomes. Meanwhile, our movement grows in numbers and creativity.

Like Code Pink, the semiparodic, all-women antiwar group that is conducting a vigil at the White House and demonstrates in garden hats and feather boas, *Lysistrata* plays on some very old stereotypes. Both say men are violent and women are peaceful, men love guns and women love children, and propose that men messed up the world and women can fix it. The positive aspect of this vision is that it gives disregarded and disrespected ordinary women a platform—as mothers and homemakers—from which to demand attention as significant social actors; the downside is that it valorizes that very powerlessness.

It was one thing for Aristophanes to fantasize that the women of Athens—who had no rights and little public presence—could turn the tables on their men: Comedies, after all, are about reversals of the usual order. Thus Aristophanes' men are emotional and weak-willed, while his women are (comparatively) rational and firm; his patriarchal state is no match for a motley group of housewives, who seize Athens' treasury and manage it perfectly well, thank you. In his play, the women's victory brings peace, but also a restoration of the accustomed gender order: Everyone goes home to make up for lost time in bed. Curiously, Lysistrata seems to have no husband or family—perhaps because, as Barnard classics professor Helene Foley suggested to me, she is a stand-in for the virgin goddess and protectress of the city, Athena. But maybe also because, even in a comedy, a brilliant, self-confident, female leader who treats men as equals was too obviously incompatible with Athenian family values.

There's certainly enough left of the old gender order to keep the play funny and relevant, and I enjoyed Lysistrata Day tremendously. But for the long haul, gender-based appeals to women trouble me, even when they're funny (sign at a Washington demo: PATRIOTS ARE IDIOTS—MATRIARCHY NOW!). Yes, women still have primary responsibility for children, are still vastly underrepresented in corridors of power, are constantly overlooked and underrated, and are still more likely the victims rather than the perpetrators of violence. But America is a different place than it was in the 1960s, when Women Strike for Peace offered women a maternity-based logic for organizing against nuclear testing.

Women don't live in a separate domestic sphere anymore. We don't need to use our children to claim the right to speak up. Women are educated, we work, we vote, we buy our own cars and fix our own computers. Increasingly, the sexes don't fit the old binary oppositions: 15 percent of the military is female; many women have no kids and don't want any; many fathers are as deeply invested in hands-on parenting as mothers. Violence is no longer the sacred preserve of men: The NRA does everything short of painting guns pink to sell them to women. For progressive women, in 2003, to fall back on the ideology of woman-as-peaceful-outsider rings as false as Phyllis Schlafly pretending to be a housewife. That's why Code Pink has to resort to out-of-date costumes.

Women have been enthusiastic participants in some wars, such as the liberation struggles of Vietnam and Algeria. But there is indeed a US gender gap of about 13 points on Bush's plan to invade Iraq, with 44 percent of women opposing it, versus 31 percent of men—likely because his "pre-emptive war" is exactly the sort of foolish adventure Aristophanes was talking about. (In 413 BC, two years before he wrote *Lysistrata*, the Athenians invaded Sicily, with disastrous results.) The big story, though, is not about gender at all. It is that around the world, just about everybody, male and female, is against this war. ■

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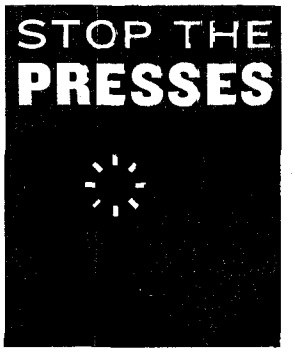
ERIC ALTERMAN

'Rules for Changing the World'



This was intended to be a sweet little prewar column about an artist I admire, Rosanne Cash. Still sexy after all these years, she just released her first commercial CD in nearly a decade after having remarried, had a fourth kid, signed with a different record company and lost and regained her voice after nearly three years of silence.

I said yes to writing about Rosanne when the Capitol publicist called about *Rules of Travel* because (a) I've always wanted to meet her, (b) she was kind enough to blurb my Springsteen book and I've never had the chance to thank her, and (c) hello, she's Johnny Cash's daughter, though it's not easy to see the connection musically. Johnny is gruff, to the point and occasionally prophetic; Rosanne is smooth and subtle. Johnny is inspiring; Rosanne, comforting, even warming. I was hoping to learn something about where these differences derive.

Over cappuccinos in a Chelsea bakery, I asked Rosanne about trying to relaunch her career at age 47 in an industry that cares more about the lint in Britney's bellybutton than the adult ambivalence to which she gives voice. "When I first moved to Nashville," she recalled, "the first record exec I met said, 'Well now, we just have to make this girl fuckable.'" Rosanne resisted, and it paid off. "I guess I was naïve, but I thought I was this tough little songwriter, pseudorock chick, less kittenish than Chrissie Hynde–ish. And this has worked to my advantage as I've gotten older." Indeed, Rosanne is the first musician I've met who doesn't complain about her record company. "They get everything about me," she says.

What's it like to be the "Daughter in Black"? Rosanne has been sensitive about this issue for most of her career, but now with dad singing on the new album, it seemed OK to ask about their relationship and how it felt for him to always be on the road. "Dad belongs to the world. He doesn't just belong to his family. A huge part of his impact is defined by his absence, and it arranges your DNA," she says. "I really want to stress that I am not bitter about this—whose life would I have traded it for?" And the pressure? After all, did she have to go into the family business? "Because I am a woman, I do not have to hold myself up against my dad. My father is a truly great artist, and a revolutionary artist, and he is going to look back at the arc of his life with that joy or pain. I won't, either because I wasn't willing to make the sacrifices, or I never had it in me in the first place."

Well, that's about it for the nice, innocuous column I wanted to write. What with an unnecessary, unprovoked war on the way, that column became impossible halfway through my interview. Returning from the ladies' room, Rosanne informs me that she's to appear at a press conference the following day to support an effort spearheaded by David Byrne and Russell Simmons called "Musicians United to Win Without War." She also signed a full-page protest in the *New York Times*, together with Lou Reed, Lucinda Williams and Steve Earle, along with a bunch of hip-hop and world music artists.

This kinda pisses me off. I ask Rosanne who really cares what a bunch of musicians or artists think about Iraq. Robert Redford on the environment and Paul Newman on gun violence are one thing—those guys have done their homework and know their issues as well as any expert. But what do Missy Elliott or Dave Matthews know about international politics? I suggest that perhaps the left has paid a steep price for the misimpression, shared by much of the country, that pampered, spoiled stars like Barbra Streisand and Alec Baldwin are liberalism's most significant spokespeople. Rosanne admits to sharing my ambivalence. "Yes, it kind of turns me off when artists get on their soapboxes. Art does not give you a better insight into politics. But if I learned anything from my dad—who, by the way, opposes this war more passionately than just about anyone I know—it's that if you're not willing to stand publicly behind what you believe, what good are you?"

David Fenton, the PR guru who helped facilitate the effort and the full-page *Times* ad, calls my pissy I've-got-a-PhD-in-this-stuff attitude about celebrity politicking "purposely stupid." The whole point of using artists, he explains, is to open doors in the mainstream media that have so far been closed to the anti-war point of view. "I've been turned down trying to book ex-ambassadors and national security professionals [by producers] who are clamoring for Janeane Garofalo and Mike Farrell. If we need celebrities to get people to listen to [liberal national security expert] Mort Halperin, so be it. That's the craziness of the media we're trying to open up. It's also the only way to reach lots of young people, who, believe it or not, don't read *The Nation*."

OK, fair point. I apologize. If the likes of Ms. Elliott and Mr. Matthews can go where yours truly cannot in helping to create a lasting, significant and sensible antiwar movement, then I'm all for it. I think it was Mark Twain who said nobody ever went broke overestimating the idiocy of the American television punditocracy. Kudos to Messrs. Byrne and Simmons for realizing this before I did.

Properly chastened, I return with Rosanne to the broader question raised by my talk with Jackson Browne last fall [see "Stop the Presses," Nov. 11]. Just what is the relationship between art and politics? "Politics are not good for art," says Rosanne, who says she finds that few musicians mix the two with much success. "Too much politics in art comes out of self-righteousness or bitterness. Too often, you lose the art, and then it is just politics that rhyme. And who gives a shit about that?" Then again, a handful of visionaries, she admits, have figured out how to do it right. "Steve Earle, Springsteen and my dad are among the few artists who can mix the two without affecting the integrity of their work. It's organic. They tend to step into character rather than rail against the system. And if it resonates on a soul level, it can change the world."

What? Three more lines? OK, that's just enough room to again plug my book, *What Liberal Media?* (Basic Books, www.whatliberalmedia.com). ■

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ARTICLES

ONLY WE WHO GUARD THE MYSTERY SHALL BE UNHAPPY

by TONY KUSHNER

At the close of George W. Bush's news conference after the Republican sweep of Congress last month, a reporter asked what the president had given his wife for their 25th anniversary, Nov. 5, which the couple celebrated at the White House. Mr. Bush, who was by then out of camera range, responded with a lascivious wink, prompting startled laughter from reporters who had no trouble figuring out what he meant.

—Elisabeth Bumiller

New York Times Book Review, *December 1, 2002*

(Three children in pajamas and bathrobes sit in small chairs in a neat row. Behind them, an angel is standing. Before them, facing them, a large comfortable armchair, unoccupied. Beautiful light.

The angel is, and remains throughout the play, unfailingly kind and polite.)

ANGEL: Dear Children. Please rise and give a warm welcome to our distinguished visitor, the First Lady of the United States, Mrs. Laura Welch Bush.

(The children rise, wave their arms excitedly, open their mouths to cheer. The only sound they make is the bird music from Olivier Messiaen's Saint François d'Assise.

Laura Bush enters, dressed in a purple plaid ensemble, carrying a book. She speaks with a gentle Texas drawl. She is a very nice lady. The children cheer and cheer.

She stands in front of the armchair. She motions for the children to stop cheering and sit.)

ANGEL: Sit, children.

(They do.)

LAURA BUSH: Why thank you children. I don't believe I've ever had a more beautiful welcome, really really lovely. But… May I ask?

ANGEL: Please.

LAURA BUSH: Most of the kids I meet when I visit for a reading program—and I do so many of these, I love reading to kids, I meet so many kids—but most of the kids are, are wearing——

ANGEL: They aren't usually wearing pajamas?

LAURA BUSH: No, they aren't! They…well, they wear uniforms! Or if they go to a school that doesn't require uniforms, they wear, well of course you like to see them dressed neat, I do, but you know they'll wear all sorts of things. Except PJs. I just never saw that before. It's sweet.

ANGEL: Perhaps this is the first time you have read to dead children, Mrs. Bush?

LAURA BUSH: Perhaps it is! And I have to admit, children, I'm nervous. I've never met actual dead children before. Nor actual children from Iraq. Before I met my husband I traveled all over, children, all over the world, and since we moved into the White House I have also traveled, but never to Iraq. So you are the first Iraqi children I've met and you look real sweet in your PJs. And I'm sorry you're dead, but all children love books. All children can learn to love books if you read to them. That's why I've come—to read to you, to share one of my favorite books with you, because when a parent reads to a child, or any adult reads to a child, even if that child is dead, the child will learn to love books, and that is so, so important. *(To one of the children:)* How did you die, darling?

ANGEL: In 1999, an American plane dropped a bomb filled with several tons of concrete on the power station near his village. He was already malnourished; he had been malnourished since

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birth, because of the sanctions. The power station that was crushed by the bomb was believed to be supplying power to a plant suspected of producing certain agents necessary for the development of biotoxins. We do not know if it did. We do know that it supplied power for the water purification system for his village. He already had gastroenteritis and nearly chronic diarrhea, for which medicines were unavailable. Then the water purification system failed and he drank a glass of water his mother gave him infested by a large intestinal parasite. He died of dehydration, shitting water, then blood, then water again, so much! Then a trickle, everyone was sad, there was no food, he shook so hard the screws holding his bed together were loosened. It took three days to die.

LAURA BUSH: That's really awful.

ANGEL: Yes.

LAURA BUSH: Saddam Hussein is a terrible man.

ANGEL: Yes.

LAURA BUSH: *(To the child:)* Darling I'm sorry. I truly am. What a terrible world. May I sit?

ANGEL: Oh of course, please do!

(She sits in the armchair.)

LAURA BUSH: What can I say to you? Oh how can I say this? It isn't right that you should have had to die because your country is run by an evil man who is accumulating weapons of mass destruction. But he is, you see, he really is, everyone knows this and he will kill many, many other children all over the world if he isn't stopped. So, so it was um, *necessary* for you to die, sweetie, oh how *awful* to say that, but it was, precious. *(To the angel:)* May I hug him? I just would like to——

ANGEL: I'm afraid not, Mrs. Bush. The children aren't… ummm, they're incorporeal, they're like…shadows, or mirages, or dreams, it's hard to explain.

LAURA BUSH: And why are they in their pajamas?

ANGEL: Oh yes, I was about to explain. In Paradise, all dead children wear pajamas.

LAURA BUSH: Always?

ANGEL: Only pajamas, for all eternity. Bathrobes and slippers too, of course.

Tony Kushner's most recent play was Homebody/Kabul. *This scene is the first of a new play titled* Only We Who Guard the Mystery Shall Be Unhappy. *No performance or reading of this work may be given without express permission of the author, which will be happily granted to anyone wanting to use it at antiwar events. For permission please contact him at: MysteryGuardians@aol.com.*

LAURA BUSH: Well isn't that *fascinating*. Why is that?

ANGEL: Like all children in pajamas they are full of regret that their day has ended. But also secretly they are comforted, like all children in pajamas. Murdered children, the children who died especially terrible deaths—this child for example! *(The angel indicates a child:)* She was in a shelter in 1991. A smart bomb found its way down the ventilator shaft of the shelter. The smart bomb believed, mistakenly, that it had found the ventilator shaft of a factory that manufactured parts for nuclear weapons, but the bomb was mistaken. Four hundred people were incinerated at a temperature of 900 degrees Fahrenheit. It was on CNN. Perhaps you watched?

LAURA BUSH: No, I…oh my God! I did! I saw! It was green! Phosphorus! Night footage! I *remember* that.

ANGEL: Melting felt to her, paradoxically, like the turning of an instant into solid ice, and then in the next instant like drowning in wild ocean surf, jumbled inside out, only *fast*, and then she was dead. Her family had been celebrating Eid! Children who die especially terrible deaths are given especially nice pajamas. Please continue your explanation. Mrs. Bush is explaining why you are dead, and in addition to being married to the President of the United States she is also a smart lady, she was a librarian! Please listen children.

LAURA BUSH: *(Softly, trying hard to explain:)* Because without sanctions there'd be no stopping him. And perhaps there'll be a war and many, many more Iraqi children will die, and oh, honey, no one wants that, *no one wanted you dead*! Oh God no, I mean God no, what sort of animal would want that? No, it's a terrible sin and I'm sure we'll all have to pay for it, me and Bushie and—I call him Bushie, my husband, I'm not supposed to do that in public, I promised I wouldn't but then he went and made that joke the other day that I wasn't out on the campaign trail for the midterm elections because I had to stay in Crawford and sweep the porch after it rained, and you know children I keep a *very, very* neat house and yes I do sweep the porch but he makes me sound sometimes like a…a frump! And anyway Bushie is a funny name, huh, a funny name for a President, President Bushie? Without sanctions and war, Saddam will go on till he has the power to do something unspeakable to another country, to the US or, or, well any other country, it could be anywhere. He gassed the Kurds! So he must be stopped and you, you were caught in crossfire and that is…

There's just no word for what it is.

And we'll pay for your deaths one way or another. He just hates it when I say that, my husband, it's not in his nature to think that way, but I believe it, sweetie, I do. I think there is guilt when a child dies even if the death was in a just cause, and one person's guilt is guilt for everyone—that's in this beautiful book *(she holds out the book)*—and we suffer that guilt, me and Bushie and Poppy and Bar and the UN Security Council; and you suffered your death, all sorts of Iraqi people die for the sins of your leader, for his evil, and you know some people say serves 'em right, but that's just vengeful and, and indiscriminate and those people are wrong. They're wrong is all, and *(to the angel:)* how many chil-

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dren have died in Iraq, you know, what with the sanctions and the bombing and all?

ANGEL: The bombings of course have never stopped; they have been continuous since the Gulf War ended. It never ended.

LAURA BUSH: How many children, do you know?

ANGEL: Hundreds of children. Thousands of children. 150,000 children. 400,000 children. Who's counting? No one is counting. A lot. From diseases related to the sanctions and the power outages and the depleted uranium dust shed from the casings of American missiles? Perhaps related? Probably related? Nearly 600,000 children have died. Many, many children have died.

LAURA BUSH: Oh gosh. And on the bright side, all those dead children and yet look, you have maintained such a low student-teacher ratio. Three-to-one!

ANGEL: We believe a low student-to-teacher ratio is necessary for learning.

LAURA BUSH: I agree!

ANGEL: And yet in the United States it's so high, on the average.

LAURA BUSH: On the average, thirty-to-one, forty-to-one! *Way, way* too high! I was a teacher once. Before I married Bushie. Or, as I sometimes call him, The Chimp. You know, those *ears*. It would be nice if there was government money to make schools smaller. For living children. But you see, honey, sweetie, precious—do they have names?

ANGEL: They do, but I'm not allowed to tell you.

LAURA BUSH: Why not?

ANGEL: I'm not allowed to tell you that, either. Sorry.

(Little pause.)

LAURA BUSH: Oh. All right. Well anyway, children, free educations with three-to-one student-teacher ratios or even twenty-to-one student-teacher ratios or even enough classrooms with enough *desks to sit in* would be swell, wouldn't it, but... one of the lessons from the wonderful book I'm going to read to you today is that if you accept free bread, or free whatever, education, daycare, whatnot, if you accept that free stuff you will have to give up freedom in exchange, and that isn't right. Freedom is what matters, not things of the earth. Like food. And I know you died starving, honey, but look at your nice pajamas! Do you see what I mean?

ANGEL: Children, do you see what Mrs. Bush means?

(They stand and answer, talking happily, but again the only sound is Messiaen's birds.)

ANGEL: They really like you, Mrs. Bush.

LAURA BUSH: And I really like them.

ANGEL: What is the book you're going to read to them?

LAURA BUSH: It's my favorite passage from my favorite book, children. The book is a Russian novel of the nineteenth century, and it's called *The Brothers Karamazov*, and the section I love most from this wonderful book is called "The Grand Inquisitor." Well, it's a little *strong* for live children, so I usually read them, oh, you know, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, but I figured, being dead, you all command a broader view, and I hope you're going to like it. I think you will!

ANGEL: Who is the author?

LAURA BUSH: A reactionary Christian mystic epileptic compulsive gambler anti-Semitic Russian nationalist genius *genius genius* named Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoyevsky! Some people say he was the greatest novelist ever, and I agree with those people, he was! I love him, I really sort of am *in* love with him. I think he and I would have had a real understanding. He wasn't so nice, apparently, but he would have *gotten* me, I think, you know? What I go through, daily, in my heart. Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoyevsky was I think...sometimes I think the only man who could really understand me, and many, many women feel this way. At least in Texas we do. They broke a sword over his head, Dostoyevsky, then they tied him to a post and over and over they were going to shoot him for treason but they didn't, it was a sick joke, can you imagine children, how ghastly, *knowing*, just *knowing* you were going to die and then, and then...you open your eyes and you are still alive! Still alive! How horrible! To be still alive! If my husband had been in charge back then Dostoyevsky would've been dead for sure—my husband, he executed everyone they told him to, everyone they *let* him, I should say, my God, *a hundred-and-something people* and he never even missed his early, *early* bedtime, nor for that matter, from what I could see as I sat up reading and rereading Dostoyevsky, ever even stirred in his *sleep*! *Notes From the Underground*, *The Possessed*, *The Idiot* and he'd be all, like *(she imitates a hideous bass snore:)* KKKKKKKZZZZZZNNNNXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXxxxx-xxxxxxx.

Well he was tired.
He's tired a lot.
From the gym.

(Little pause. She is lost in thought.)

ANGEL: Mrs. Bush?

LAURA BUSH: Well, anyway, in this section of *The Brothers Karamazov*, an atheist intellectual, Ivan, is telling his sweet, handsome young brother, Alyosha, about a poem he's made up, about Christ our Lord—well, not *your* Lord...you are probably Muslims?

ANGEL: They are.

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LAURA BUSH: That's nice! There's nothing wrong with that! But this is a Christian story. Is that OK?

ANGEL: Children?

(They stand and respond. Bird music.)

LAURA BUSH: I'll take that for a yes! It's a universal tale! I bet it has been translated into Arabic, even into…whatever it is you are speaking now, um, bird music! Dostoyevsky's Ivan, arrogant like all intellectuals, and an atheist too—like most intellectuals he's an atheist. They're mostly all godless, even the ones *think* they're religious. The smarter they are the more godless, seems to me, but I don't really hold that against them like some do. I mean this'll stay between us, right, but don't get Lynne Cheney started, OK? *Woo-OO*!

Ivan tells his pretty young brother this story: Jesus Christ has come back to earth, back to the streets of Seville during the Spanish Inquisition, and the first thing He does, well, this will interest all of *you*, Christ immediately resurrects a dead little girl! Jesus says "Sit up," and the dead little girl does, sits *up* in her coffin, holding a white rose bouquet. But then the Grand Inquisitor, this 90-year-old Catholic bishop, he's passing by and sees this miracle, so he arrests Jesus Christ and throws him in a dark, filthy filthy dungeon, with, you know, old rotten straw and mouse pillies and, and the Grand Inquisitor says, "I know *just* who you are"—everyone recognizes Christ, somehow they all just know him! "I know just who you are and I am going to burn you at the stake in the morning as I have burned one hundred-and-something people already, and I didn't lose a nickel's worth of sleep over any of 'em." Some Christian, huh?

And what you will hear if you listen carefully, children, is how the Grand Inquisitor is really a godless old miscreant who has abandoned God for the devil, whom he calls "The Dread Spirit." But it's the devil no matter what fancy name you call him, and how he and his church, the Catholics—and that's another reason I can't read this to live American kids, is the Catholics are so friggin' *touchy*!—the Catholic Church wants to correct the mistakes the Grand Inquisitor says Jesus made when he was here the first time out. People want bread! They don't want God or freedom, they want bread! And they want to be free of free will! And they want everything to be uniform, universal everywhere, everyone just alike! This is what the Grand Inquisitor says. Jesus wanted people to be free, the Grand Inquisitor tells Jesus, but people can't manage freedom so the Church, and not just the Church but totalitarians of all sorts throughout history are here to enslave them, feed them, dictate to them. That's what the Grand Inquisitor offers, freedom from freedom! And he tells Jesus they will make a world, he and his fellow comrade totalitarians, he and his big government buddies, where hundreds of millions of people will be happy, fed slaves—they'll even be allowed to sin, a little, just so they feel happier being slaves. Whereas Christ would never manage more than a handful of followers, only a very few would be strong enough to be actual free people and follow Jesus, whereas the Grand Inquisitor would be leading hundreds of millions of happy sinful slaves, every one of whom is proud to call him or herself a Christian!

And because, because he was such a great writer and this is such great, great literature, when you read it sometimes with all the "do-ests" and "thinkests" and "wouldsts" and "thous" like in the Bible, and as you listen to the immensely persuasive powerful tongue Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoyevsky put in the mouth of the Grand Inquisitor, sometimes—even though I know the Inquisitor is the villain and Christ is the hero—Christ says *nothing*. And my eyes start to blur sometimes when I am reading this passage and I forget who is the villain and who is the hero and I think, you know, "Right ON Grand Inquisitor FOR GOD'S SAKE WOULD IT BE SO *GODDAM TERRIBLE* to FEED PEOPLE, AND AND IS IT *REALLY* WORTH IT STARVING KIDS SO THEY CAN WEAR PJs IN HEAVEN?"

And because it's genius literature of the first rank, and not some magazine article, your eyes sometimes reblur all over again as you're reading the twisty words, and all of a sudden you don't agree with the Inquisitor, he's the devil again, talking talking, but suddenly something has happened and it's not the people you are used to thinking of as evil totalitarian people who are the evil totalitarian people who are the pals of the Inquisitor and, well, the devil! You think wait a minute, isn't this Grand Inquisitor starting to sound like *(whispers)* John Ashcroft, who just between us—*(she shudders violently) Cuh-REEPy*. You lose track of who is who, your compass is gone all screwy, you started out knowing for sure, and you end up adrift, and the more you think on it the more the clarity of the argument sort of melts like people in 900-degree Fahrenheit heat, and all you can see anymore is pain, pain and more pain, like it's not about ideas anymore, it's just about raw naked SUFFERING, and…

And I know, because, because I have suffered. I mean, he was right, the Grand Inquisitor was right, let's be honest. It's too hard, the choice between good and evil, it's too hard. Knowing it's yours. Yours to make. *You know all those times you betrayed God*, you drank and smoked and hated your folks or your kids and you make a stupid little nothing mistake like everyone else makes and gets away with but you don't, blammo! All the perfumes of Araby can't wash the blood from your poor little hand, who cares if everyone else makes this mistake, GOD DOESN'T CARE, you are BUSTED forever! Only, only a a a *shitty* person, pardon my French, only a really shitty, shitty person who isn't a real person but only seems to be but is actually an *animal* forgives themselves for…

The death of children.

But for those of us who aren't like that, we must be punished.

Just between us.

And Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoyevsky understood this, he wasn't snowy old high-toned Count Tolstoy, no, he's down there in the shit with you, froth on his lips and his thick tongue stiff, stiff and distended, dear Fyodor Mikhailovich, the smell of cigar smoke clinging to the coarse nubbly wool of his cheap black suit and his foul epileptic's breath, and sometimes, when, when I must suffer the touch of, of HIM. The Dread Spirit in his newest disguise. Sometimes when his hands are on me I say to my lonesome self, "Laura Welch, this is *not* The Dread Spirit who is touching you, it's just dear, dear Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoyevsky," *and he puts his whiskery mouth close to my ear and he hisses, "Sinner!"* He knows, he's the only one who knows what that word means! SINNER! *I like children! I really, really do! 600,000?* Jesus Christ. *A year from now, in what pit of hell will I awake!?* I was a Democrat

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when I was a girl! This is what great literature can do! He weeps as he rattles me. I never shall be chaste except he ravish me. And I am rattled till my screws come loose, I am rattled like, like...the way, when I am in a mood, I attack and scour a sooty pot.

(She demonstrates this: A wild, wild, savage assault with a steel-wool pad on a large grimy greasy skillet, one hand gripping the skillet like a vise, the other arm working like a steam piston; growling, tears.

The children stare.

Laura Bush slumps.

Little pause.)

ANGEL: Mrs. Bush?

LAURA BUSH: Children, could you make that sound again for me?

(They stand and comply. She listens.)

LAURA BUSH: Great! Thank you children. You are beautiful. I should start to read. May I kiss them first?

(The angel considers the request.)

ANGEL: Go ahead.

LAURA BUSH: Thank you.

At the end of "The Grand Inquisitor" Christ kisses the Inquisitor on the lips. And the Inquisitor lets him go. Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoyevsky lets this pass without comment. We call this ambiguity. Is it a Judas kiss? Is it a kiss of approval? Forgiveness? Sexual lust? After we are done, perhaps you will tell me, in this wonderful bird music of yours.

(She gets up, goes to the children, kisses each child on the forehead, returns to the armchair, picks up her book. She looks down, opens it, then looks up.)

LAURA BUSH: Thank you, children. The kiss glows in my heart. That's from *The Brothers Karamazov*.

(She reads:)

"In His infinite mercy He came once more among men in that human shape in which He walked among men for three years fifteen centuries ago."

In fact, now that I think of it, it's something Ivan says about the Grand Inquisitor.

(She finds the page:) Here it is. "The kiss glowed in his heart. But the old man adhered to his ideas."

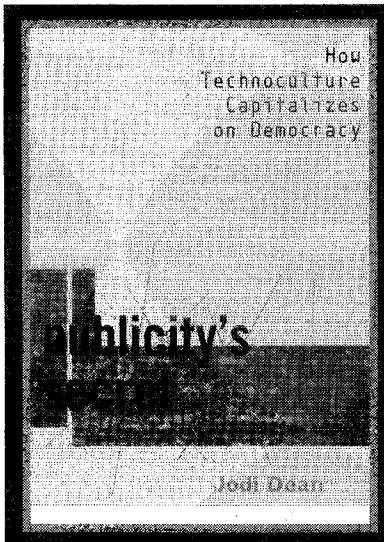
(She closes the book. She looks troubled. She smiles at the children. They smile at her.)

LAURA BUSH: The kiss glows in my heart.

But.

I adhere to my ideas.

End of Scene. ■



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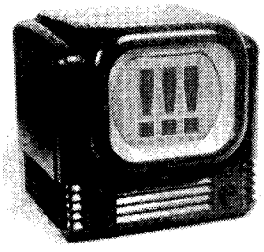

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EVEN BEFORE THE ATTACKS, A BACKLASH AGAINST FEMINISM HAD BROUGHT THE RETURN OF THE AUTHORITARIAN MALE. NOW, MACHO IS EQUATED WITH KEEPING US SAFE.

KAREN CALDICOTT

Neo–Macho Man: Pop Culture and Post-9/11 Politics

RICHARD GOLDSTEIN

Say what you will about oil and hegemony, but the pending invasion of Iraq is more than just a geopolitical act. It's also the manifestation of a cultural attitude. To understand how this war is being packaged and sold, you have to look at the fantasies Americans consume as they graze through the vast terrain of TV, radio, movies and the Internet. In this charged environment, pop culture and politics swirl around each other like strands of DNA. The product of this interplay is the current crisis.

From Colin Powell dissing the French as cowards to Donald Rumsfeld raising his fists at the podium, the Bush Administration bristles with an almost cartoonish macho. It's a little like watching pro wrestling in a global arena. Why is this smackdown style acceptable to many Americans now? Bill Clinton has an explanation. "When people feel uncertain," he said after the Democratic Party's recent electoral rout, "they'd rather have somebody who's strong and wrong than somebody who's weak and right."

This truism seems to resonate with human nature, but other crises have produced a very different response. Faced with the Great Depression, not to mention Pearl Harbor, Americans chose a President who seemed strong and right. It's a measure of how the nation has changed that when we were attacked this time we closed ranks behind a leader whose program leaves many with a sinking feeling. Polls show a similar ambivalence about the war, yet it hasn't led to a revolt against the Administration. Why are people willing to suspend their disbelief in Bush? Why are we drawn to the strong man who is wrong?

The answer lies not in our stars but in our superstars. To understand how America has changed since 9/11, it's necessary to examine the attitudes that dominated movies and music before 9/11. The mindset of manly belligerence was already in place when the planes struck. In the horror that followed, we struggled for a way to respond—and we found it in the icon of neo–macho man.

Not so long ago, you couldn't say "macho man" without thinking of the Village People. Hypermasculinity was so thoroughly discredited that it seemed fit for camp. Now it's back, in earnest. But this revival was no bolt from the blue. The neo-macho hero has a history.

He sprang from the reaction to feminism that began in the 1980s and advanced in the '90s, even as the empowerment of women became a tenet of Democratic politics. As women rose, so did male anxiety, and in this edgy climate a new archetype appeared in pop culture: the sexual avenger. His rage often focused on personal betrayal, but implicit in his tirades was a sense of the world turned upside down.

By 1990 the revolt against feminism was a hip commodity. Shock-jocks like Howard Stern and Don Imus dominated drive-time radio, misogynistic comics like Sam Kinison and Andrew Dice Clay were late-night TV sensations, rock marauders spat variations on Axl Rose's final solution for bitchy women: "Burn the witch." Meanwhile, at the multiplex the sexually cornered male, embodied by Michael Douglas in a series of films from *Fatal Attraction* (1987) to *Disclosure* (1994), was the new Dirty Harry.

At first, these performers combined racial and sexual resentment for a double thrill. Imus and his sidekicks did cottonfield imitations of black celebrities, Axl railed against "immigrants and faggots [who] come into our country and...spread some fucking disease," the Diceman vowed vengeance on immigrants. But racism was an impediment to crossover success. Misogyny,

Richard Goldstein, an executive editor of the Village Voice, *is at work on a book about Eminem and the culture of cruelty.*

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however, was not. In the Clinton era, the backlash reached a fever pitch—and Hillary was hardly its only target. Pop culture invited men of all races and ages to bond over bitch-bashing, and as the 1990s progressed every market niche had its version of the sexual avenger.

The most commercial hip-hop fronted for this backlash. Veering from its radical roots in the black community, gangsta rap became a spectacle of male conquest. Its paragon was the player (pimp) ruling over abject hos and raining violence on resistant bitches. Because these top dawgs trafficked in sadism, they were sexy in a way that angry white males of the 1980s could never be. And because they were for the most part black, their rage could be cast as progressive. Many liberals who would never buy into Rush Limbaugh's "feminazi" rants were drawn to neo-macho rappers who carried the imprimatur of the street. Postmodernists saw this music as an exercise in role-playing or an outlet for fantasies that would never be carried out in life, certainly not in politics. Armed with denial, even a pro-feminist man could enjoy the spectacle—and critics called it art.

The most unexpected boost to backlash culture came from young women who gravitated to its forbidden games. It was hot to play the ho and cool to call yourself a bitch. You could always tell yourself that this was just an erotic pose. But the return of fetishized femininity was about more than sex. Men were not the only ones made anxious by the new female agency. Many women feared the loss of desirability that their power might bring—and teenagers were especially prone to these uncertainties. The new model offered a way out for boys and girls alike.

Without the backlash, other, more progressive tendencies in hip-hop might have prevailed. But the flight from feminism had created a huge market for bitch-bashing anthems. By meeting this demand in a powerful musical form, gangsta rappers tapped into the choice demographic of suburban teens. Sexual violence was only part of the thug package, but it turned millions of white kids on, resonating with the broader culture of misogyny. The male avenger was emerging as the insignia of rebellion for a new generation.

Still, there were alternatives to the backlash in the 1990s. Daytime TV was as wild as talk-radio, but with a far less patriarchal slant on sex and society (to suit its largely female audience). Celebrities like RuPaul offered a potent dissent from the polarities of gender. Female comics and rappers could be as wicked as their male counterparts, and Madonna was a bigger draw than any neo–macho man. Eminem was still a guilty pleasure. Today Madonna gives interviews extolling the virtues of matrimony, and Forbes.com proclaims that Eminem "may be the most popular man in America." What has changed?

The short answer is 9/11. In its wake, the once-mocked figure of the dominant male has become a real-life hero. Saluting the new spirit of patriarchal vitality, *People* included Rumsfeld in its most recent list of the sexiest men alive. In his feckless swagger we see the timeless union of militarism and macho. Then there's Rudy Giuliani, who emerged from 9/11 as "America's mayor." His authoritarian streak has been repackaged as the mark of leadership. Like any alpha male, Rudy can confer macho on other Republicans, as he did for George Pataki in a campaign ad proclaiming New York's pallid governor "a real man."

ANNOUNCEMENT

A WRITING CONTEST:

WOMEN'S VOICES IN WAR ZONES

Since Sept. 11, 2001 there has been constant public reference to concepts of terror, war and security, but little debate about their meaning, which differs from place to place and person to person. And the voices of women and girls, both within the United States and in the rest of the world, have been conspicuously absent from the discussion.

To bring forward women's ideas on this subject, and enable them to be heard in the public area, Women's WORLD, a global free-speech network of feminist writers, is initiating a writing contest which will be co-sponsored by The Nation Institute. The subject is Women's Voices in War Zones.

Eligibility: All women are welcome to participate; age and citizenship are no barrier. We are particularly interested in seeing work from writers, activists, students and immigrants or refugees.

Rules: Submissions must be previously unpublished personal essays of 1,000 words or less, in English, that address one or more of the following questions:

What does the term "war zone" mean to you? Do you live in a war zone or state of terror? Is it personal or public? Who is or are the aggressors? How do you resist? What keeps you going? Where does your hope or security lie? How do you imagine bringing this terror to an end? Does your government or society or family provide you with security or is it a source of your unease?

We will read only one entry per person.

All entries must also include either a one page vita with contact information or a short biographical statement with the writer's full name and contact information: mailing address, phone or fax numbers and e-mail address.

Submissions can be sent by e-mail to the following address: ratna@wworld.org; or by fax to 212-947-2973; or post to Women's WORLD, 208 W. 30th St. #901, New York, NY 10001. E-mail submissions are preferred.

Deadline: Submissions must be received by 5 PM (Eastern Standard Time) on May 1, 2003. Winners will be announced in early June.

Prizes: Prizes will be given to women in three categories: 1) residents of the US; 2) residents of other countries; 3) immigrants or refugees in any country.

There will be three first prizes of $250 each and three second prizes of $100 each. Winning essays will be published on the website of Women's WORLD and its affiliates; announced to the press; and circulated to global e-mail lists.

Copyright: By sending us an essay, contestants automatically give Women's WORLD the right to publish it in any form and to license others to do so, whether or not the essay wins a prize.

Judges: The judges will be a diverse panel of three established writers.

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That phrase can now be uttered without a trace of irony. It informs the banter of Jay Leno, who reacted to the rescue of trapped miners last summer by remarking, "It's great to see real men back in the news. I'm so sick of weasels." It even colors the prose of style writers in the *New York Times*, as in this observation from a female reporter shortly after the dust of 9/11 cleared: "A certain kind of woman [is] tired of the dawdlers, melancholics and other variants of genius who would not know what to do with a baseball mitt or a drill press." Eminem put it more succinctly when he called his sensitive rival Moby "a little girl." Such rhetoric no longer reads like an expression of ideology. The real man seems vital—and necessary in a crisis.

We haven't always been so attuned to the need for our leaders to be macho. It wasn't the measure of FDR's strength. But Roosevelt arose from a culture that regarded protecting the weak as an important manly virtue. The pop heroes of his day were loner lawmen, reluctant warriors or world-weary survivors with a secret decent streak. There were bad boys, to be sure. The denizens of Depression-era crime films were as violent and vital in their narcissism as today's gangsta rappers. But something crucial has changed. The bad boy's primary target is no longer the system but strong women and weak men. Power is the ability to turn both into "my bitches," in the parlance of prison and pop. It may be wrong to rule others, but it's strong, and these days dominance is its own reward.

Both George W. Bush and Eminem offer the spectacle of an aggrieved man reacting with righteous rage.

Not that the good guys have disappeared. The firefighters who gave their lives in the Twin Towers are heroes of 9/11, as they should be. But this benign image allows us to forget that the dark side of macho has also been unleashed. Male grievance has found a geopolitical target in Saddam. Sexual revenge has been sublimated into military payback. Underlying this process is a sense of the world as a jungle where friendship is transient, danger is everywhere and one can never have enough power. This is the classic rationale for macho. Feminism teaches us that it's a pretext for preserving the order. Liberalism tells us it's paranoid. But what once seemed like paranoia is regarded as reason, and what was piggy now feels natural.

No one plies the neo-macho trade like Eminem. Talent notwithstanding, what made this blue-eyed rapper a star was his baroque misogyny (as in: "My little sister's birthday, she'll remember me/For a gift I had ten of my boys take her virginity"). Eminem is the hottest recording artist in America, a singular honor for a man who never wrote a love song to a woman. Instead, he struck gold (or rather, platinum) by ruminating about raping his mother and slaughtering every bitch in sight. At first, these attitudes were impossible for critics to ignore. Those who praised Eminem felt compelled to issue a caveat about his hate. There was a line in liberal culture he couldn't cross. But that changed with his first starring role in a film. *8 Mile* is a fictionalized biopic set in streets so mean that even the sun stays out of sight. It opened in November to rave reviews, and it's raked in more than $100 million since. A little cleaning up is all it took to transform this monster from the id into a populist hero, a Rocky for our time.

Gone are Eminem's attacks on women and gays (as in: "Hate fags? The answer's yes"). In *8 Mile* he never busts a rhyme against a bitch, not even his mom; he adores his little sister and sticks up for a homo. The film firemanizes Eminem by placing him in the tradition of working-class heroes and blunting his sexism with stirring images of racial harmony. This is balm to liberals—and it's allowed mainstream critics (nearly all of whom are men) to overlook the meaning of Eminem's rise.

A similar sublimation occurred when Elvis Presley became a mainstream icon. His first feature film, *Love Me Tender*, was a historical romance that didn't call for pelvic action. As his public broadened, he didn't need to grind in order to be understood. Of course, Elvis embodied a different morality than Eminem does. His appeal was Dionysian rather than sadistic; his lewdness didn't preclude the possibility of love. These values fueled not just Elvis's ascendance but also a sexual revolution that would change society. A radical new vision, which began as the stuff of pop, evolved into a generational norm. The Eminem experience is producing something similar—with very different consequences.

It's no coincidence that *8 Mile* ruled the box office right after Bush's GOP romped at the polls. These two young patriarchs seem utterly opposite, but they have fundamental things in common. Both are social conservatives who stand for a male-dominated order. Both owe their appeal to anxiety over sexual and social change. Both offer the spectacle of an aggrieved man reacting with righteous rage. These qualities, which once seemed dangerous, now read as reassuring. The macho stance that once looked stylized is now a mark of authenticity.

Sexual terror is rarely dealt with as a factor in politics. The intimate nature of this anxiety prevents it from being addressed, and as a result, it operates in powerful, unapparent ways. That's certainly how sex played out in the 2000 campaign, when Al Gore was tarred with the priss brush while Bush butched his way to the White House.

It's easy for Republicans to seem manly, for the same reason pundits call the GOP the Daddy Party. Their tough-love style represents patriarchal values of strength and order. If the Democrats are (often disparagingly) called the Mommy Party, it's because their attitude expresses feminist values of empathy and equity. Democratic men are not less masculine than Republicans, but they tend to be less macho in their manner, reflecting an etiquette that allows both sexes to project power. This is also why Democratic women tend to be less courtly and decorated than the daughters of the GOP. When voters see these qualities in a candidate, they are reminded of the underlying sexual politics. If Democratic men seem weak and Democratic women all too strong, it has much less to do with character than with the angst that the party of feminism generates.

Clinton brought a trickster's charms to the table, but Gore was running against that type, and he never figured out how to combine probity with vitality. A marathon kiss from Tipper didn't do the trick, since she was another one of those bitches—a kinder, blonder Hillary—while Laura Bush left no doubt about her proper place, three steps behind her husband. Then came Naomi Wolfe,

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whose effort to counsel Gore on color schemes was met with the same scorn that greeted Jimmy Carter when he got attacked by a rabbit. Dubya didn't have to count on a gal to tell him how to dress—he was his own Man! Even his flubs at identifying world leaders made him seem like a dude. After all, no one ever lost macho points for being stupid.

Gore won the popular vote, but as heir to an Administration that had produced peace and prosperity he should have triumphed. It wasn't just his stiffness that hurt him; it was the backlash. By then it was so embedded in mass consciousness that Bush's good-old-boy affect seemed natural while Gore's New Age style seemed politically correct. Too many moderates were lulled by Dubya's charming macho. The culture had clouded their ability to read its ideological content. Bush didn't look right wing; he just looked right.

Now that patriarchy is associated with survival, how can the party of feminism prevail? It's easier to see the problem than the solution, but a good start would be for Democrats to reject the idea that they are weak. This image is a figment of the backlash, meant to demean those who support the empowerment of women. It can't be dispelled by butching up, since the real issue—sexual equity—will remain. The only option for the Mommy Party is to embrace its identity. That means stripping Republican macho of its mystique. This is a moment for speaking truth to power.

The Democrats should hammer the point that virtually every issue—not just abortion—is a women's issue. Take Bush's plan to privatize large swaths of the federal government. Any attempt to cut wages will have an undue effect on women, since so many of them work in the public sector. Then there's the signal Bush sends when he defunds women's bureaus in federal agencies and closes the White House Office for Women's Initiatives and Outreach. There's a pattern here, but it's hard to see because gender is the great unmentionable in public life, and women are especially invisible as citizens in a time of crisis.

It's even harder to address the culture that animates these policies. No progressive wants to be a censor, a puritan or, worse still, a fogy. But attention must be paid, because cultural values are central to social reality. A norm can only be undone if people understand the damage it does, and macho is a stunting force even when it looks fresh and young. Under its thumb, a generation is growing up with attitudes that will warp their lives, not to mention the course of American politics.

Fortunately, this is not another lost liberal cause. The public's doubts about Bush persist, as his seesawing popularity attests. There's a lingering uncertainty about the war, and not just among doves. These misgivings reflect a deep ambivalence about the macho code. Yet this primal issue is rarely broached. What will it take for the best and brightest Democrats to address the relationship between male dominance and the current crisis? Don't count on courage. Politicians usually arrive when the coast is cleared by culture. It remains for artists to challenge the backlash and for critics to criticize it.

It's time to create a new vocabulary of dissent, one that makes a clear connection between war fever and thug power. There's no more urgent task. The dawgs of war are about to be unleashed. Thousands will die, billions will be spent and most of us will have to do with less. These are the wages of following a leader who is strong but wrong. He's the man; we're his bitches. ■

WOMEN'S SPORTS ARE UNDER ATTACK BY JOCKS WHO HAVE AN ALLY IN THE PRESIDENT.

Title IX: Political Football

RUTH CONNIFF

Girls in ponytails and soccer jerseys packed the front of a room at the National Press Club in Washington, DC. They elbowed each other and giggled as kids from across the nation spoke lovingly of basketball, pole vaulting and field hockey, and in support of Title IX—the 1972 law that has become synonymous with the rise of women's sports. Since Title IX went into effect thirty-one years ago, girls' athletic participation has skyrocketed. The number of girls playing varsity sports has gone up from one in twenty-seven in 1972 to almost one in two today.

KAREN CALDICOTT

Despite all the good feeling Title IX has engendered among girls and their parents, the law is currently under attack. The National Wrestling Coaches Association filed a lawsuit against the Education Department claiming that Title IX is decimating men's college sports, forcing colleges to cut hundreds of wrestling programs—along with gymnastics, diving and other teams—in order to meet "quotas" for female athletes. The aggrieved jocks have found an ally in President Bush, who formed the Commission on Opportunity in Athletics last June to re-examine the law.

The high school girls descended on Washington for their press conference–cum–pep rally just as the commission convened its final meeting at the Hotel Washington. Outside the hotel, the Feminist Majority and the conservative Independent Women's Forum held dueling press conferences. Inside the grand ballroom, a wrestling coach wearing a "No Quotas" button cruised the perimeter, handing out literature calling on the commission to "reject the gender politics of the special interest groups."

That would be groups like the Women's Sports Foundation—which helps girls seek equal funding and facilities for their teams—and Dads and Daughters, whose executive director,

Ruth Conniff is Washington editor of The Progressive.

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Joe Kelly, emceed the high school girls' event.

Title IX, said Kelly, "is one of the best things that ever happened to fathers."

"Sports is a natural comfort zone for men, and Title IX makes it a bridge to our daughters," he said. He told the story of a friend, Dave, who coached his son and daughter in basketball, and was appalled by the inferior facilities provided to his daughter's team.

"Dads get angry when daughters play on old fields or gyms that are in disrepair," Kelly said. And that's what Title IX was designed to fix. "Guys like Dave are not radical feminists. They simply know sports are good for girls. They also know sports are good for boys. Don't tell me you're going to treat my daughter differently than my son."

High school girls still get about 1.1 million fewer opportunities than boys to play sports, according to the National Coalition for Women and Girls in Education. But Bush's commission finished its work by making a series of recommendations to weaken Title IX. Instead of making girls' sports proportional to the number of female students enrolled, the commission recommended that schools aim for approximately 50/50 boy-girl representation. Schools that don't reach parity would be allowed to use interest surveys to show that girls are getting as much opportunity as they desire. According to the Women's Sports Foundation, the changes could result in the loss of 300,000 participation opportunities and $100 million in scholarships for female athletes.

'Sports is a natural comfort zone for men, and Title IX makes it a bridge to our daughters.'
—Joe Kelly, of Dads and Daughters

The deck was stacked at the commission from the beginning. High school athletes and coaches who support Title IX didn't get to testify. Title IX opponents like wrestlers' groups and the Independent Women's Forum had disproportionate input. The commission's two strongest Title IX advocates, Julie Foudy, captain of the US National Women's Soccer Team, and Olympic gold medalist Donna de Varona, were treated to eye-rolling by fellow commissioners and outright hostility by wrestlers' groups. In late February, the two refused to sign the final report, charging that the commission failed to acknowledge continuing discrimination against female athletes.

Still, despite the battle-of-the-sexes tone in DC, some sincere anguish is driving the backlash against Title IX.

Doug Klein coaches high school wrestling at the Ida Crown Jewish Academy in Chicago. "I had such a good time when I walked on the team at William and Mary," he recalls. Today his old college team has been cut, and other teams no longer take walk-ons (as opposed to recruits) because, he says, they have to keep their rosters small in order to comply with Title IX gender-equity rules. His star wrestler recently visited Lehigh and Cornell, and couldn't even get a coach to talk to him.

"Boys who aren't superstars—nobody is interested in them. And that's really unfair," Klein says. "Somebody made the point on one of these [wrestling] websites: 'I'm 5'5", 120 pounds, what sport am I going to do?' There are not many opportunities in sports for little boys and little men."

That may be the most painfully honest comment ever made by an opponent of Title IX. Instead of focusing on the big men's sports that suck up all the resources in college athletics, a lot of little guys who are getting crushed blame women. Klein, too, blames Title IX for "gutting wrestling"—though he concedes that Title IX may not be the main problem.

"When you read the wrestling magazines, they're reluctant to point the finger at football," Klein says. "But football is the 800-pound gorilla." Indeed, major teams award up to eighty-five scholarships a year and field rosters of 100 or more players, while top football coaches can earn more than $2 million a year. Schools could easily comply with Title IX by making small cuts in these big-budget programs, instead of cutting men's roster spots. Title IX advocates calculate that just by dropping scholarship spots for football benchwarmers—cutting back from the eighty-five players now allowed by the NCAA to the fifty-three used by the NFL, for example—and by dropping a few of the most ridiculous perks, such as hotel-room stays on home-game nights, schools could add back all those smaller programs they've been eliminating.

There is a myth that spending huge amounts of money on football makes sense because the game will bring in even more. The reality is that in the race to field a winning team, jack up alumni giving and secure lucrative TV contracts, even big-time football schools are losing money. Take the University of Wisconsin. UW lost $286,700 on its Rose Bowl appearance in 1998. Until schools get off the football treadmill, athletic program budgets will feel the squeeze, with or without Title IX.

Donna Shalala, President Clinton's Secretary of Health and Human Services, is one of the nation's biggest boosters of Title IX—and of big-budget football. As UW chancellor, Shalala brought the university's football program into the big time. She hired coach Barry Alvarez and built a giant new sports facility the same year she presided over the elimination of UW's baseball, men's and women's gymnastics, and men's and women's fencing teams. Now president of another football powerhouse, the University of Miami, Shalala is an unabashed proponent of Title IX: "It's had a huge impact on providing opportunities for women's sports." Yet she is also an unabashed proponent of big-time football.

Shalala says it was a budget crisis, not Title IX, that forced the cuts at Wisconsin. "We cannot use Title IX as an excuse for our lack of disciplined management and our financial problems," she says. She argues that it's possible to pay for minor sports and be a football power: "People have to restrain their costs, and they have to be honest about what football costs, and go out and raise more money."

Shalala uses the populist language of Title IX, saying, "The whole point is to provide opportunities for men and women." But in practice, building an athletic department around big-time football has resulted in schools—including UW—killing sports programs that once provided opportunities for regular students. It has also meant that college sports, more and more, are not about promoting amateur participation, sportsmanship or character but rather about raising a school's profile and getting a piece of the sports entertainment action. "This is not," says Shalala, "intra-

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mural sports." While Title IX has protected many women from these trends, no structures are in place to save minor men's teams from the football monster.

Talking to university administrators about athletic department budgets is like talking to the Democrats about campaign finance reform. Everyone is in favor of more "opportunity" and "participation," but when it comes to reining in football spending, no one wants to cash out first.

According to Cheryl Marra, senior associate director of sports administration at UW, "We don't spend any more here than anywhere else. But who's gonna give first?" UW has to offer its football players chartered jets and posh facilities, says Marra; otherwise, "Ohio and Michigan will say to recruits, 'You know, at Wisconsin they don't treat you right.'" The only way out, according to Marra, is for the NCAA to crack down on excessive football spending. Then no school would be placed at a disadvantage.

The wrestlers' attack on Title IX is based on a gamble: that if the government relaxes Title IX rules, athletic departments will shift money back to their teams. But that's hardly a sure thing. Athletic directors are no more interested in minor men's sports now than they used to be in women's sports. Responding to the complaints of downsized wrestlers, Marra says, dismissively, "Why can't they accept that people don't want to play the same sports they did 100 years ago?"

Ironically, Title IX's very success is being used as an argument for its dismantlement. As with affirmative action, the law's opponents argue that the job is done—women have reached equality and no longer need special attention. This argument resonates with girls of the post–Title IX generation, who feel pangs of guilt when Title IX is blamed for the elimination of minor men's sports. "I'm in favor of Title IX, but not for cutting guys' sports," says Kym Hubing, a sprinter at Wisconsin.

Indeed, many students now take women's athletics for granted. Male and female athletes hang out together and support each other. This is one of the most profound, positive effects of Title IX. "You're friends. You're equals," says Greta Bauer, a UW hurdler. "When you walk into a party, the guys will see you and punch you in the arm and say, 'Hey, how are you doing?' The other girls will look at you like, 'How did you get inside the circle?'"

Being "inside the circle" means that women in Division I sports are envied just like the men. There is an aura of exclusivity about hanging out in the expensive sports facilities, studying in the athletes' study hall, living in jock housing. Like breaking into any formerly segregated club, being part of the sports scene on campus means gaining privilege.

If the Education Department heeds the Commission on Opportunity in Athletics, the march toward equality will stall. High schools and colleges across the nation will stop counting heads and start taking interest surveys. That may sound fair to young athletes like Hubing. But when Title IX started, most girls couldn't imagine themselves as serious athletes. An interest survey at that time would have determined that only a few real tomboys deserved a chance to play. It was the opportunities offered under the law that created such a radical change in the culture. Women now make up 42 percent of college athletes—maybe not equality, but an enormous leap, thanks to the law. Interest surveys would freeze that progress where it is today.

And this would be a loss not only to girl athletes but to the culture of sports as a whole. Title IX has become one of the last bastions of amateur sports. While there are no limits on the amount of money a school can shift from other men's programs to football, Title IX insists they keep open athletic opportunities for women. Women's sports—often praised for their "purity," for the sheer joy of the athletes and for the fact that players get decent grades—have kept alive the ideal of the scholar-athlete.

But maybe not for long. ■

LETTERS
CONTINUED

(Continued From Page 2)

that everything left to charity comes off the estate tax, dollar for dollar, will encourage people to leave more money to charities. If the objective is simply to raise revenue for the government, impose a reasonable rate (much lower than currently) on *all* property of taxable estates, allowing no deductions. If the objective is to discourage concentration of wealth, then change to an inheritance tax, for individual bequests above a certain level, e.g., $5 million.

But the fundamental ethical question is, What entitles the government to treat death as a taxable event? If Bill Gates Sr. wants the government to get his money after he dies, let him leave it to the Treasury. JOHN F. BRADLEY

...TO YOU AND ME, BUT NOT TO THEM

New York City

■ Three cheers to Gar Alperovitz for "Tax the Plutocrats!" [Jan. 27]. If the Democrats are ever to retake the government from the barbarians who stole it from its rightful owners, i.e., the people of the United States, they will have to start with a more progressive tax policy. But a federal "wealth tax" is seemingly not permitted by the Constitution, which limits Congress, in the case of any "direct" tax, to one that is apportioned in accordance with the population. Indeed, it took the Sixteenth Amendment to allow the government to levy a tax on people's incomes without apportionment.

The Constitution does grant Congress the power to impose what appear to be "indirect" taxes—duties, imposts and excises—provided they are uniform. It doesn't define these terms, but a wealth tax would not appear to fit any of those categories. It seems the plutocrats who wrote our Constitution were not about to allow a tax on wealth, i.e., slaves, land, etc. It will take another constitutional amendment to provide this form of taxation of the wealthy. In the meantime, let's make the income tax more progressive, as Alperovitz suggests. And for heaven's sake, let's keep the estate tax. I. MEYER PINCUS

San Francisco

■ Many features of the tax system working to the advantage of the rich are rarely mentioned. For example, since anyone can give up to $11,000 per year to another person tax-free, a member of a rich family could receive $44,000 tax-free per year if both parents plus two grandparents or an aunt and uncle each give the maximum. Thus, in ten years that person could accumulate $440,000 tax-free. A member of the working class, on the other hand, may never see a dime that isn't taxed. Other well-known advantages for the better-off include irrevocable trust funds, which allow considerable estates to change hands without being taxed. Small wonder that with such favorable conditions for the transfer of riches, "a mere 1 percent of Americans owns just under 50 percent of financial wealth," as Alperovitz notes.

JAY LYON

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COMMENT

(Continued From Page 7)

ment against Saddam? A lot of readers were not comforted.

It's too late for nuanced evasions, too late for the *Post* to reposition its divisions to the rear. It sold this war, and now if America becomes the author of massive violence in a war of choice, not necessity, the *Post* will be implicated in the bloody consequences. The antiwar movement will not go away once the bombing starts, but all of its objections to this war will become vividly relevant to the news coverage. Reporters and editors can still ask the hard questions and need not pretend to be shocked if the US colonial governor decides to stall on the promise of Iraqi democracy. Americans at large, I fear, are about to lose their sense of injured innocence. Maybe the news media can lose some of their "patriotic" deference to the warriors in charge. WILLIAM GREIDER

Donahue—War Casualty

War may or may not be inevitable, but a one-sided discussion of US policy toward Iraq appears to be all but guaranteed on network television. Whatever the merits of MSNBC's *Donahue* show, the behind-the-scenes maneuvers that led to its cancellation on February 25 illustrate the extent to which basic commitments to honest dialogue on the networks are collapsing as the threat of war becomes more real.

"We were hoping to break through the noisy drums of war on cable and become a responsible platform for dissenters as well as Administration supporters," said Phil Donahue, referring to the feverish "Let's get ready to rumble" rhetoric on Rupert Murdoch's Fox News channel and the terror alert–happy CNN. "The *New York Times* op-ed page features a variety of views regarding the Bush war on Iraq, including regular columnists who have been quite critical of the Administration's foreign policy team. MSNBC's voice should be no less diverse. The hiring of [right-wingers] Mike Savage, Dick Armey and Joe Scarborough suggests a strategy to out-Fox FOX."

With Donahue shuffled out to allow for the expansion of a show called *Countdown: Iraq*, the right-wing spin machine kicked into gear to claim that liberals could not cut it on cable. But while it is true that Donahue's style was never a perfect fit with talk-cable's faster, rougher format—he often looked uncomfortable and regularly trailed in the ratings—the timing of his departure appears to have had a lot more to do with the politics of the moment than with traditional programming concerns. An internal study commissioned by NBC executives had expressed grave concerns that if war began, Donahue's show would become "a home for the liberal antiwar agenda at the same time that our competitors are waving the flag at every opportunity." The study was right about the flag-waving by the competition. As Donahue was being shown the door, Fox personality Sean Hannity was campaigning to get antiwar actor David Clennon fired from the CBS drama *The Agency*, and Martin Sheen, who plays fictional US President Josiah Bartlet on NBC's *West Wing* series, told the *Los Angeles Times* that network executives have "let it be known they're very uncomfortable with where I'm at" on Iraq. "The closer the impending war gets, the more the networks seem to be moving to appear 'patriotic'—which seems to mean not being outspoken, or even skeptical," says AllYourTV.com analyst Rick Ellis. "I think the question of how the networks cover the war and how they interpret what it means to be patriotic is going to be a real issue, and what happened to Donahue points to why it should be an issue." (Alone among cable networks, Black Entertainment Television is displaying skepticism, headlining its reports "Iraq: Is War the Answer?")

Donahue, one of the most identifiable TV personalities in history and an unapologetic liberal, was hired last year by MSNBC to position the struggling cable network as the thinking American's alternative to Fox and to the increasingly vapid programming on CNN and the three major networks. The theory was that Donahue would offer a program with a point of view—as does Fox's Bill O'Reilly, the ratings leader in the time slot. In the weeks after Donahue went on air last July, it was possible to imagine that he might actually be allowed to do a show that mattered—initial programs featured Studs Terkel speaking at length about how a cable show that questioned the Bush Administration would be "an oasis in the desert," Senator Russ Feingold discussing problems with the Patriot Act, Ralph Nader and Molly Ivins talking about corporate crime to an audience of 1,000 former Enron and WorldCom employees, and former UN Assistant Secretary General Hans von Sponeck and the Institute for Policy Studies' Phyllis Bennis discussing rising tensions about Iraq with Republican Senator Lincoln Chafee and conservative commentator Ramesh Ponnuru.

As summer turned to fall, however, the Bush Administration started to turn up the rhetoric about Iraq, and executives at MSNBC and its corporate parent, General Electric–owned NBC, pressured Donahue to dumb down the discussion—and to limit dissent. "Donahue was hired before Iraq blew up to be an issue," said an industry source familiar with the development of the show. "When Iraq started to come into focus, the GE/NBC folks freaked out because they realized they had hired someone who might ask tough questions about US foreign policy."

By October, Donahue was being forced to turn his show into a deliberately pale imitation of the programs to which he was supposed to be an alternative. While his ratings did beat those of other MSNBC hosts, he never drew the audience needed to compete with Fox or CNN. Network executives rejected proposals to build a liberal audience in the same manner that Fox had built a right-wing one, using advertising on conservative talk-radio and in conservative publications to get conservatives tuned in. Instead, Donahue's show was micromanaged by NBC executives, who mandated a "more hawks than doves" booking policy when the discussion turned to war and who pushed Donahue to devote more time to "lifestyle" topics like the Atkins diet. Toward the end, when MSNBC put Donahue in front of a live audience, ratings ticked up. But by then, NBC executives were brandishing the study that labeled Donahue "a tired, left-wing liberal out of touch with the current marketplace" and warned he would be a "difficult public face for NBC in a time of war." The difficulty, explains Newspaper Guild president Linda Foley, is this: "Donahue was not willing to start from a presumption that the status quo, the establishment, is always right. As this war gets closer, it looks like that is becoming the only acceptable presumption around the radio dial, across the cable spectrum and on the broadcast networks." JOHN NICHOLS

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BOOKS & THE ARTS

Storm Warnings for a Supply-Side War

IAN S. LUSTICK

THE THREATENING STORM: The Case for Invading Iraq.
By Kenneth M. Pollack.
Random House. 494 pp. $25.95.

There's nothing like a compelling icon when no compelling argument is available. That is just how Kenneth Pollack's book, *The Threatening Storm: The Case for Invading Iraq*, is presented by its publisher (the venerable Council on Foreign Relations) and how it is used. It was hailed by the managing editor of *Foreign Affairs* (which is published by the council as well) as "one of the most important books on American foreign policy in years." Of course, the overwhelming majority of those who will cite the book to support a US-led war in Iraq will not read it. They will rely on its title, its publication by the Council on Foreign Relations and the titillating biography of the author—a former CIA analyst whose advice to be tough on Iraq went unheeded during the Clinton years. It has become a talisman, not an argument.

But what does the book actually do? It provides an excellent review of the history of the up-and-down relationship between Saddam's Iraq and its neighbors and between Saddam and the United States. It vividly documents the horrors of Saddam's repressive regime. It argues that neither containment nor deterrence nor sanctions can be relied upon (individually) to prevent him from gaining access to nuclear weapons. It spells out the author's (reluctantly arrived at) belief that only an American invasion, mounted to do the job even without help from Middle Eastern or European allies, can succeed.

Ian S. Lustick, professor of political science at the University of Pennsylvania and associate director of its Solomon Asch Center for Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict, is author of several books on the Middle East.

Most of this is unsurprising to anyone who has read reviews of the book, or even to those who have read its first 300 pages. However, lurking in the book's last 100 pages is the decisive but largely ignored aspect of its argument. What may be surprising is that Pollack here spells out, somewhat unsystematically yet with admirable clarity, the conditions under which his advice for an all-out, US-led invasion of Iraq should actually be taken. What is glaringly apparent is that not a single one of these conditions has been met.

Before launching an invasion, writes Pollack, the United States must judge itself ready to commit all the resources necessary "to rebuild Iraq as a stable, functioning nation." His own estimate of the requirements for this objective includes maintaining US troops in Iraq "for five to ten years" at a cost of "$5 billion to $10 billion on reconstruction over that same period of time, plus as much as another $10 billion to $20 billion to maintain a military presence in the country." Elsewhere, Pollack suggests that the US bill for reconstruction "could easily amount to several billion dollars per year for as long as a decade." But even this higher estimate is almost certainly absurdly low, especially for bringing a heavily damaged country to the kind of "stable, prosperous, and pacific" state Pollack says is the sine qua non for not substituting one "intolerable threat" for another.

None of Pollack's warnings are more categorical and unmet than that war not be made on Iraq until after Al Qaeda's defeat.

In this regard, it is sobering to consider that Washington has agreed to pay Turkey more or less the entire amount Pollack estimates will be needed to rebuild Iraq just to compensate it for expected damage to its economy from a war—and the war is not even supposed to be fought in Turkey!

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A new novel by
PICO IYER
Abandon

A novel about a student's search for an elusive Sufi manuscript and the enigmatic object of desire who embodies it—a mysterious California woman

"A wise and graceful novel"
—N.Y. Times Book Review

"A mysterious and engrossing tale...*Abandon* blends a passion for Sufism with a passion for a beautiful California girl, and creates for the reader an enthralling journey into the self."
—Arthur Golden

"Lushly written"
—Miami Herald

"A great love story. It is everything that I love: a scholarly Englishman whose subject is Sufism, a vagabond California woman...and Pico Iyer's knockout prose."
—Annie Dillard

"A finely-wrought & sinuous novel"
—Kirkus Reviews

"Graduate work has never been this much fun"
—Alan Cheuse, NPR

Knopf
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Indeed, as Pollack writes, "our information about the situation in Iraq is poor. Once we arrive in the country, we might discover that the reality was quite different from what we had expected." Whatever the costs of reconstruction and Iraqi nation-building are, they will be high, and Pollack's point is that unless the United States is willing to pay them it should not invade. No statements emanating from Washington suggest that the Bush Administration has made that judgment. Certainly the American people have not.

Pollack also warns that other "significant price tags" will be attached to the war he has suggested. To wage that war requires that "the United States would have to be willing" to incur those costs and risks. These include the likelihood "that deaths from an invasion would number in the high hundreds for U.S. military personnel and the high thousands for Iraqi civilians," but that "we might suffer several thousand American military personnel killed and several tens of thousands of Iraq civilians killed." No poll I have seen that includes significant estimates of US casualties reports a response rate anywhere near a majority of Americans in support of an invasion. Nor has the Administration itself indicated its readiness to accept this many American deaths and the much larger number of wounded that would be associated with it.

Pollack also argues that the United States should not and cannot conduct a successful war alone. At one point he goes so far as to say that the Persian Gulf states "have a veto over whether or not we invade Iraq." Elsewhere he stipulates that "an invasion of Iraq would require a new coalition to support it"—a coalition that at minimum must include Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates. Needless to say, of these necessary allies only Kuwait and, perhaps, Turkey (although its Parliament is balking), have been cajoled or coerced into joining our "coalition of the willing."

One reason the coalition Pollack sees as necessary has not been established is that another key condition for the war has not been met. Pollack repeatedly emphasizes that as uncomfortable as it may be for many in Washington to accept, the Israeli-Palestinian problem would have to be radically reduced in scope, though not necessarily solved, before a war on Iraq would be advisable. "Much as we may not like mediating between Israel and the Palestinians, if we are going to deal with the problem of Saddam Hussein, it is necessary that we do so." Only if we "deal with the Arab-Israeli conflict and get it moving in the right direction," he writes, can we be confident of the access we will need to Egyptian air space, the support we need from the Egyptian government and the political barrier required to reduce the risk of regime collapse in several friendly Arab countries. The Israeli-Palestinian problem is identified as the source of most of the "bedlam" in the Middle East, and Pollack warns that levels of unrest in the region must be reduced if his characterization of an invasion as "the conservative course of action" is to be considered valid. "Unless and until we have done that preparatory work, an invasion of Iraq itself would be the risky option." Again, needless to say, this condition is as far from being met now as it has been since the beginning of the second intifada in the fall of 2000.

Pollack also warns that despite the dangers he sees in Saddam's Iraq and the inadequacies of other options he considers, no invasion should be undertaken unless key domestic political requirements are met. As in World War II and Vietnam, he writes, "the United States should not embark upon this [war] without the clear, expressed support of the American people." A marker of this requisite level of public support would be "the endorsement of a congressional declaration of war." Of course, Congress is nowhere near ready to pass such a declaration. Polls now show that no more than 55 percent of the American people support President Bush's handling of the Iraq issue. Hundreds of thousands of Americans are marching in the streets against the war, and it has not even begun.

But of all the warnings Pollack offers, of all of the conditions he places upon the advisability of the war option, none are more categorical and more obviously unmet than his insistence that no war can be made on Iraq until after Al Qaeda has been defeated. According to Pollack, "it would be best to hold off on plans for an invasion until al-Qa'eda [is] more thoroughly eradicated." In his conclusion he is more emphatic. "In the immediate wake of 9/11, we rightly devoted all of the United States' diplomatic, intelligence, and military attention to eradicating the threat from al-Qa'eda, and as long as that remains the case we should not indulge in a distraction [*sic*!] as great as toppling Saddam." Pollack is specifically afraid that a war in Iraq could itself lead to the transfer of weapons of mass destruction from Iraqi arsenals to terrorist networks like Al Qaeda. While allowing that the utter

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destruction of Al Qaeda would be too severe a condition for a US war in Iraq, "we certainly need to be at a point where we do not have monthly government warnings of possible terrorist attacks." Oscillating as we have been, between Code Yellow and Code Orange alerts, it is clearly the case that this condition for war, however hedged, has not been met.

Having finished *The Threatening Storm*, the careful reader will wag his or her head in disbelief. How can a book resounding with so many warnings against an invasion be heralded as a compelling call to arms? The question parallels the large question ringing in the ears of millions of puzzled Americans. What is the reason for this war? What has made it such an urgent matter to dispose of Saddam Hussein? What has changed in Iraq to produce a threat to the United States and the world that was not present eight, six or four years ago? What is the "demand" for this war?

The answer is simple. This is a supply-side war. There is very little demand for the war, and nothing in the way of a compelling necessity for it. But the enormous supply of political capital flowing toward the President after 9/11 combines with the overweening preponderance of US military power on a global level to make the production of war in Iraq not a trivial affair but one that can be embraced with relatively little thought and almost no need to appeal to a readiness to sacrifice. That a war is militarily and politically so "easy" for the United States government can explain why so little reason for a war can produce so powerful a campaign for one. It also explains why so weak an argument for it, as is contained in the Pollack book, can be so widely regarded as persuasive.

Let us consider this point more closely. History and international relations theory both teach us that unchecked power leads to hegemonic ambitions and violent efforts to achieve them. In any country there will be small groups with powerful fantasies that can have access to power. Those fantasies are usually irrelevant because of countervailing power and the all-too-apparent risks of miscalculation. But when the margin of military power is as great as it is now, it takes less to render decisive the access to power enjoyed by small groups holding extravagant, hegemonic ambitions.

Since the 1980s there has been a small but powerful group of neoconservative hawks who see in the "'remoralization' of American foreign policy" the restoration of "a sense of the heroic" and the estab-

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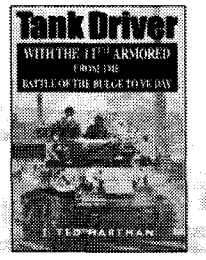

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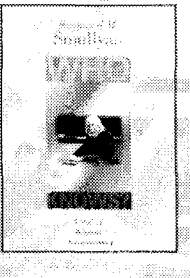

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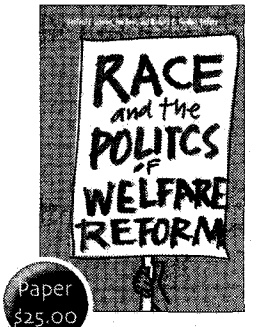

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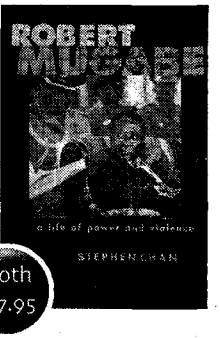

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lishment of an American position of "benevolent global hegemony" as not only good in themselves but as necessary to insure the repeated election of conservative Presidents (William Kristol and Robert Kagan, "Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 1996). The idea is to use the glories and dangers of overseas adventures to redefine the agenda of political contestation away from the bread-and-butter issues used by liberals to win elections.

With these factors in mind one can understand that the proximate cause of the Bush Administration's campaign for war in Iraq was the terrorist attack on September 11. Before that, the cabal of neocon warriors driving this juggernaut—including Paul Wolfowitz, Richard Perle, Douglas Feith, Donald Rumsfeld, Vice President Dick Cheney and the tom-tom beaters of the *Weekly Standard*—could not prevail in the battle for the President's foreign policy agenda against the prudent realism of the old Republican guard, represented (at that time) by Colin Powell and now-silenced veterans of earlier Republican administrations: Brent Scowcroft, James Baker and Henry Kissinger. After 9/11 the amount of political capital available to the President for doing anything at all that could be massaged to look relevant to 9/11 increased beyond measure. This campaign for an invasion of Iraq is thus aptly understood as a supply-side war because it is not driven by a particular threat, a particularly accentuated threat or a "demand" for war associated with the struggle against Al Qaeda, but because of the combination of an enormous supply of military power and political capital and the proximity to the highest echelons of the American government of a small cabal long ago committed to just this sort of war.

The agenda of this cabal includes not so much oil (though cheap, American-controlled oil is a part of the plan) but a desire to repeat in the Middle East the "miracle" of the fall of the Berlin wall, the collapse of the Soviet bloc and the spread of democracy throughout Eastern Europe. Demonstrating the usefulness and usability of American arms is taken, by this group, to be necessary to allow the United States to get its way in other regions, and to accomplish a wide array of goals in pursuit of its hegemonic position, without always having to use force. There is also an unstated but powerful objective to transform the Arab countries in the Middle East from states putatively obsessed with irrational hatreds of a wholly innocent Israel into rational, accommodating democracies that will give up on the Palestinian problem and let right-wing Israeli governments determine the future of the occupied territories without external pressures.

Just as Pollack's book is useful for identifying the long list of reasons the fantasies of this group are likely to lead to disaster for the Middle East and for us, so too does it document this supply-side interpretation. Pollack was close to the circles that wanted a war on Iraq during the Clinton years. He and others were frustrated by the inability to move the US government toward that objective. What changed? Pollack is very clear:

> We need to keep in mind that what makes any of this discussion possible is the shock to the American populace as a result of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and the public's willingness to make sacrifices and take forceful action to eliminate other such threats. This willingness may not last forever.

"This willingness may not last forever." Exactly. As the American people gain perspective on the character of the threats they do and do not face, as they learn to distinguish Al Qaeda from Iraq, and Iraq from anthrax attacks in New Jersey and Washington, and as they gain the capacity to think rationally about the costs and risks associated with various options for combating national security threats, support for the invasion and occupation of Iraq will virtually disappear. This appreciation of the closing window of political opportunity for the war is another reason for the insistence on it now and the determination to ignore all evidence to the contrary when it comes to discussion of the wisdom of that course of action. ■

Court Reporter

DUSKO DODER

SCOTTY: James B. Reston and the Rise and Fall of American Journalism.
By John F. Stacks. Little, Brown. 372 pp. $29.95.

On June 4, 1961, John F. Kennedy held his last meeting with Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev in Vienna. The scheduled sessions had gone badly, both men playing a game of chicken as they moved from one contentious issue to another. After a final lunch in the Soviet embassy, Kennedy asked for one last private meeting in an effort to salvage some basic understanding between the two nations. He reminded the Soviet leader that each had the ability to destroy the other, then suggested that Khrushchev abandon his demands on Berlin, which the United States could not accept. Khrushchev countered by saying "force would be met by force" and that "if the US wants war, that's its problem." Kennedy was stunned. "Then, Mr. Chairman, there will be war," Kennedy said. "It will be a cold winter."

Ten minutes later, Kennedy entered the US Embassy and went straight to a room where James Reston, Washington bureau chief and columnist for the *New York Times*, was waiting with curtains drawn. By prior arrangement, Reston had managed to slip in unnoticed. How was it, Reston asked. "Worst thing in my life," Kennedy responded honestly and without pretense. "He savaged me." Kennedy seemed to be almost in shock as he proceeded, with astonishing candor, to give details of the meeting to the journalist. The United States would have to stand more firmly against Russian demands in Berlin and the escalating Communist insurgency in South Vietnam, Kennedy said. Reston was "speechless" at the mention of Vietnam. Reston later thought that marked the beginning of America's slow slide into the Vietnam tragedy.

From the perspective of our own time, John Stacks writes, Reston's encounter with Kennedy is "almost unimaginable," because the relationship between journalists and politicians in America is often a distant and hostile one, marked by distrust and anger and cynicism. No reporter today would be trusted to hear an American President reacting honestly and without pretense to a frightening failure that could have presaged nuclear war. Nor is it likely that a reporter hearing such information without stated rules and restrictions would produce—as Reston did a day later—a care-

Dusko Doder is an author and former reporter and foreign correspondent for the Washington Post.

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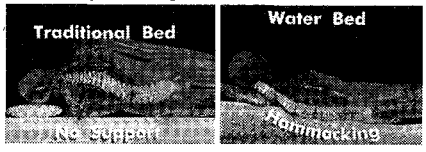

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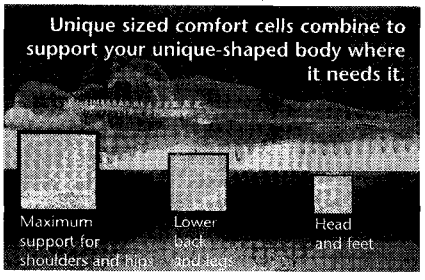
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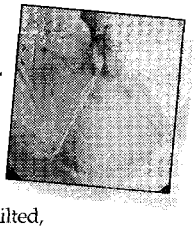

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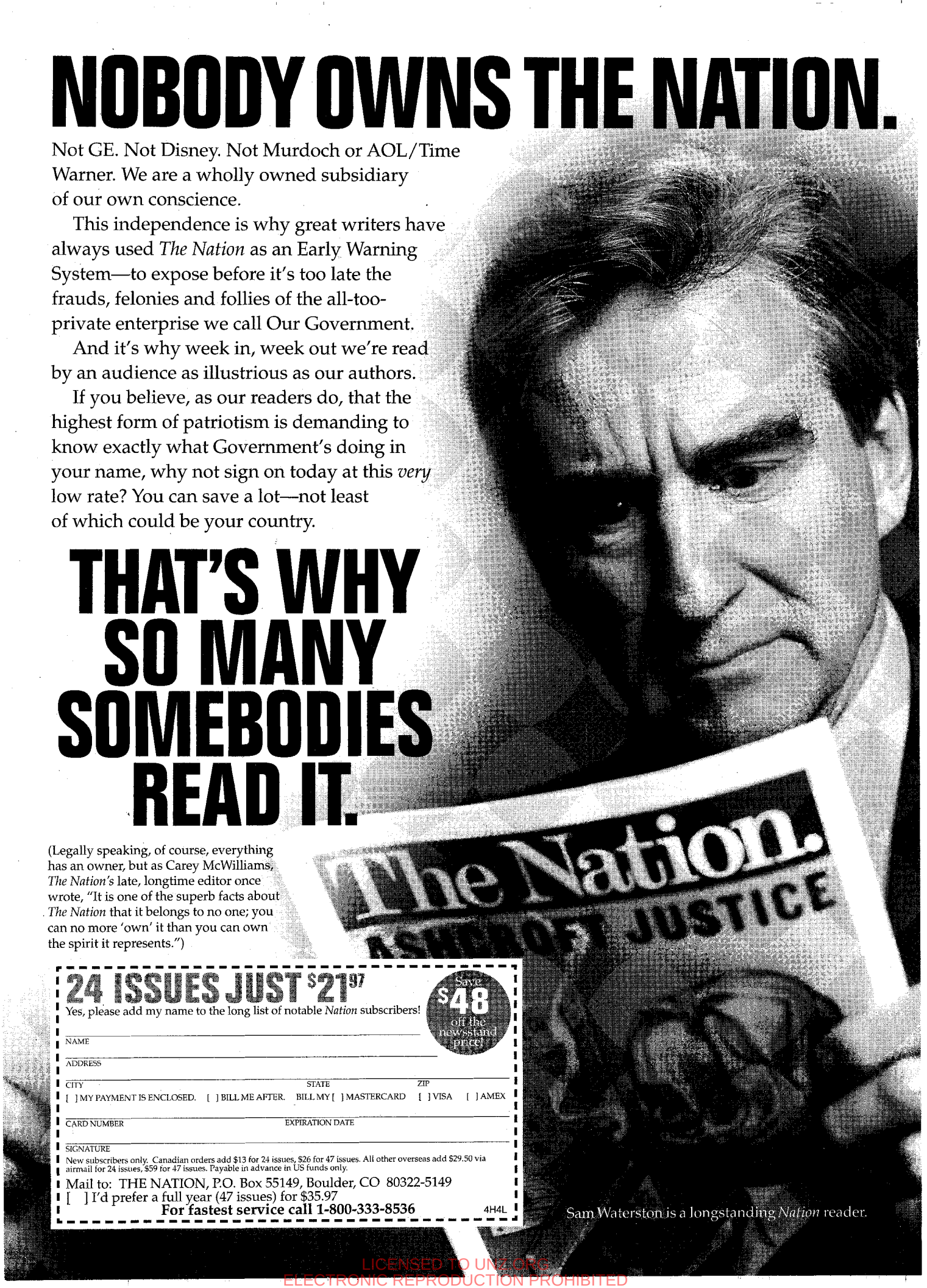

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fully worded story putting the best positive construction on an unsuccessful summit without sacrificing its real implications and without compromising Kennedy's confidences. But, as Stacks puts it, at the heart of Reston's style of journalism was "a sense of common purpose with the government and political leaders." The press and the government were seen by him as collaborators in one enterprise—the preservation of the United States.

For more than three decades Reston was the ultimate Washington insider. But first Vietnam, then Watergate, came along, and his unparalleled access to the high and mighty became a liability. His stellar career became sadly tarnished. His own colleagues turned on him in public, men whose careers he had nourished and supported. His analysis became suspect. He was seen as toadying during a tense and dramatic time. Once the very model of what young journalists wanted to be, he became the opposite: "a shill and an apologist." Or as some of his *Times* colleagues said, Reston became "the personification of what the true journalist should not be."

Stacks has written an absorbing, thoughtful and eminently readable book. He treats his subject generously, turning him into a symbol of a long-gone Golden Age of journalism that was based on "trust" between government and the press. But then again, Stacks, a veteran *Time* journalist who eventually rose to become the magazine's managing editor, is an establishment newspaperman in the Reston model who seems nostalgic for the days of crony journalism. "I do firmly believe that this nation would be better served if there were again Scotty Restons mining the inner workings of the government and telling us the truth about what they pry loose," Stacks writes in the last sentence of his book. This may explain the rather bizarre subtitle of the volume: "James B. Reston and the Rise and Fall of American Journalism."

But Stacks pulls no punches. His portrait of Reston is one of an ambitious Scottish immigrant whose education was skimpy but who was smart, witty, charming and endowed with the talent to suck up to the rich and powerful without seeming to do so. His prose was graceful and marked by a sense of balance and humanity. He was a consummate backscratcher. As a youth he befriended James Middleton Cox, the newspaper publisher and governor of Ohio, who loaned Reston money to attend the University of Illinois. Upon graduation Cox gave him a job at his paper, where Reston started as a sportswriter. He moved to the Associated Press in New York as a feature writer after that. In 1937 the AP sent him to London, where Reston charmed the *New York Times* bureau chief into hiring him in 1939. Ultimately he sucked up to the publisher of the *Times*, Arthur Hays Sulzberger, and his wife, Iphigene, and was regarded as almost a family member. The Sulzberger relationship vaulted Reston into a unique position at the *Times*, where he could do practically whatever he wanted. Sulzberger once put it this way: "What's Good For Reston Is Good For The *Times*." Small wonder that Reston rose to the top of American journalism and that he was widely sought after by the rich and powerful. He counted among his sources people like Dean Acheson, John Foster Dulles, John McCloy and Henry Kissinger. Reston was also someone who could phone the President of the United States.

If there's a weakness in this book it rests on the author's own belief in the virtues of crony journalism, which means that a group of "responsible officials and responsible reporters" should decide among themselves what the public should be told. Reston's "responsible reporters" are not "the old-fashioned scoop artists, gossip mongers and saloon rail journalists."

But is it true, as Stacks asserts, that Reston was "so well respected by those in power" that they granted him "unimaginable access"? We don't have to look beyond Bob Woodward's book *Bush at War* to disprove this notion. (Bush went even further by supplying the author with contemporaneous National Security Council notes.) At issue here is not access. The question, rather, is whether an American President now would honestly admit to failure under similar bleak circumstances.

More important questions are not even asked. Did Kennedy arrange the secret meeting in Vienna to pick Reston's brain? Reston had no special knowledge of Russia, nor was he an old friend of the President's. More important, why didn't Kennedy first discuss his frightening setback with his Secretary of State or other top advisers? Kennedy's court biographer, Arthur Schlesinger Jr., doesn't even mention this episode in his authoritative *A Thousand Days*.

Yet the meeting suggests that Kennedy was keenly aware of changes that the advent of television was bringing about in the relationship between government and the press. Displaying his good looks, his charm, his humor and his intelligence during regular televised press conferences, Kennedy was able to reach past the newspapers directly into people's living rooms. He no longer needed the daily print press as badly as before. But he needed a handful of opinion-makers like Reston. Kennedy was his own public relations general. He understood that honesty is the best policy. He brought them inside the tent and seduced them with candor. He could count on their cooperation.

Kennedy used Reston for the most important missions: to signal his intentions to Moscow. Three months after the Vienna summit Kennedy invited Reston to his Hyannis Port home, where he told him to write on his own authority a two-part message. The first part was that the Kennedy Administration was prepared to go nuclear in order to retain access to Berlin. Khrushchev, Reston wrote, "would be well advised to take this into account" unless he wishes to preside over a "Soviet wasteland." The apocalyptic message filed under the Hyannis Port dateline made headlines around the world. But the second part was more significant and was placed in the last paragraph—in Russian writing culture at that time the punch line was invariably in the concluding paragraphs. It was that Kennedy accepted Khrushchev's concept of "peaceful coexistence." Kennedy, Reston wrote, is ready to "accommodate himself to history on the basis of 'co-existence.' The question is whether Khrushchev will allow an honorable accommodation to take place."

To insure that the message was absolutely correctly worded, Reston submitted the column for White House approval (with his editors concurring).

Submitting a news account for approval is a rather unprofessional thing to do, except that Reston and top *Times* editors saw themselves as players in the practical conduct of US policy. There are numerous

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other incidents that in retrospect seem questionable, to put it mildly. Early in his career, Reston helped Senator Arthur Vandenberg craft a speech in which the isolationist Republican recast himself as an internationalist and a godfather of the cold war bipartisan foreign policy. The Senator gave Reston fulsome credit, telling a news conference that the journalist had planted the idea of collective security against Soviet expansionism into his head. Vandenberg became an excellent source for Reston, especially after becoming the Senate Foreign Relations Committee chairman. In May 1948 Reston wrote an article for *Life* arguing Vandenberg's suitability to be Republican nominee for President.

Reston's greatest "scoop"—or, as Stacks puts it, "journalism at its best"—was his acquisition in 1953 of a copy of the full record of the Yalta conference. The Eisenhower Administration wanted the record made public to counter its selective use by Senator Joseph McCarthy, who claimed it showed that Washington had rolled over for Stalin. The British government opposed full release, partly because of Churchill's disparaging remarks about the French. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles decided to send copies of the original document to twenty-four high-ranking members of Congress, knowing full well that someone would leak it to the press. Reston rushed to see Dulles and persuaded him that a "calculated leak" to the *Times* was a better idea. Reston won an Overseas Press Club award. He had won a Pulitzer Prize eight years earlier for a similar "scoop" when he obtained position papers about the negotiations to create the United Nations. The source was a member of the Chinese delegation and a former intern at the *Times* whose relatives had friendly ties to the Sulzbergers. The participating governments were outraged. Everybody suspected the British of leaking. An FBI investigation was ordered but soon abandoned. As a result, Reston became a figure on the Washington scene.

Was this prizewinning reporting? There were other stories in those years that Reston knew about and that should have been told but were not. The government deliberately used humans in radiation experiments; the CIA staged coups and political assassinations abroad while testing mind-control drugs on the unsuspecting at home. Dulles repeatedly told Reston about Senator McCarthy's "lies and public drunkenness," but Reston never used the material provided on background. Much later, in his memoirs, he wrote: "We were, I'm sorry to say, intimidated much of the time by the popularity of McCarthy's lies and his charges that his opponents were 'soft on communism.'" When a reporter began investigating rumors that Kennedy had been married before taking Jacqueline as his wife, Reston stopped the investigation. "I will not have the *New York Times* muckraking the president of the United States!" He later discouraged reporters from looking into the influence-peddling scandal involving Lyndon Johnson's close aide, Bobby Baker, for fear of damaging the presidency. He was so dazzled by power that when Senator Edward Kennedy drove Mary Jo Kopechne to her death in the waters of Chappaquiddick in the summer of 1969, Reston, who was vacationing on Martha's Vineyard, dictated this lead to the *Times*: "Tragedy has again struck the Kennedy family." The victim was not mentioned until the fourth paragraph. Scotty at that point was the executive editor of the *Times*.

For a long time Reston was a player, yet not a fully uniformed member of the team. But that altered disastrously with his relationship with Henry Kissinger, when Reston was no longer an outsider with superb connections on the inside but a full-fledged insider: "the wrong place for a respected journalist to be," says Stacks. Kissinger provided Reston with scoops, but he also used him for delivering messages to foreign governments and domestic rivals. In late 1976 Kissinger wanted to send a message to Daniel Patrick Moynihan, the Ford Administration's outspoken UN ambassador—that he wanted him to resign. Reston's chatty column said that President Ford and Kissinger, who publicly supported Moynihan, were in fact deploring him in private. Moynihan resigned his post the next day.

Reston's best role was as a reporter and commentator on the game, not as the major player he was during his last two decades. It was as a reporter and commentator that he made a lasting impact on American journalism. He forced the *Times* to abandon its stodgy, dense style and to open its pages to pieces analyzing the most important news events. Soon most other papers began to emulate the *Times*; Stacks is hardly exaggerating when he says that Reston "revolutionized the style in which American newspapers are written." He also helped raise the quality of journalism beyond what it had ever been before. He recruited talented young men (it was men, not women) to the shabby trade of newspapering, and together they turned it into something much more respectable and glamorous. His reporters received pay nearly equal to that of the people they covered. They understood the subjects they

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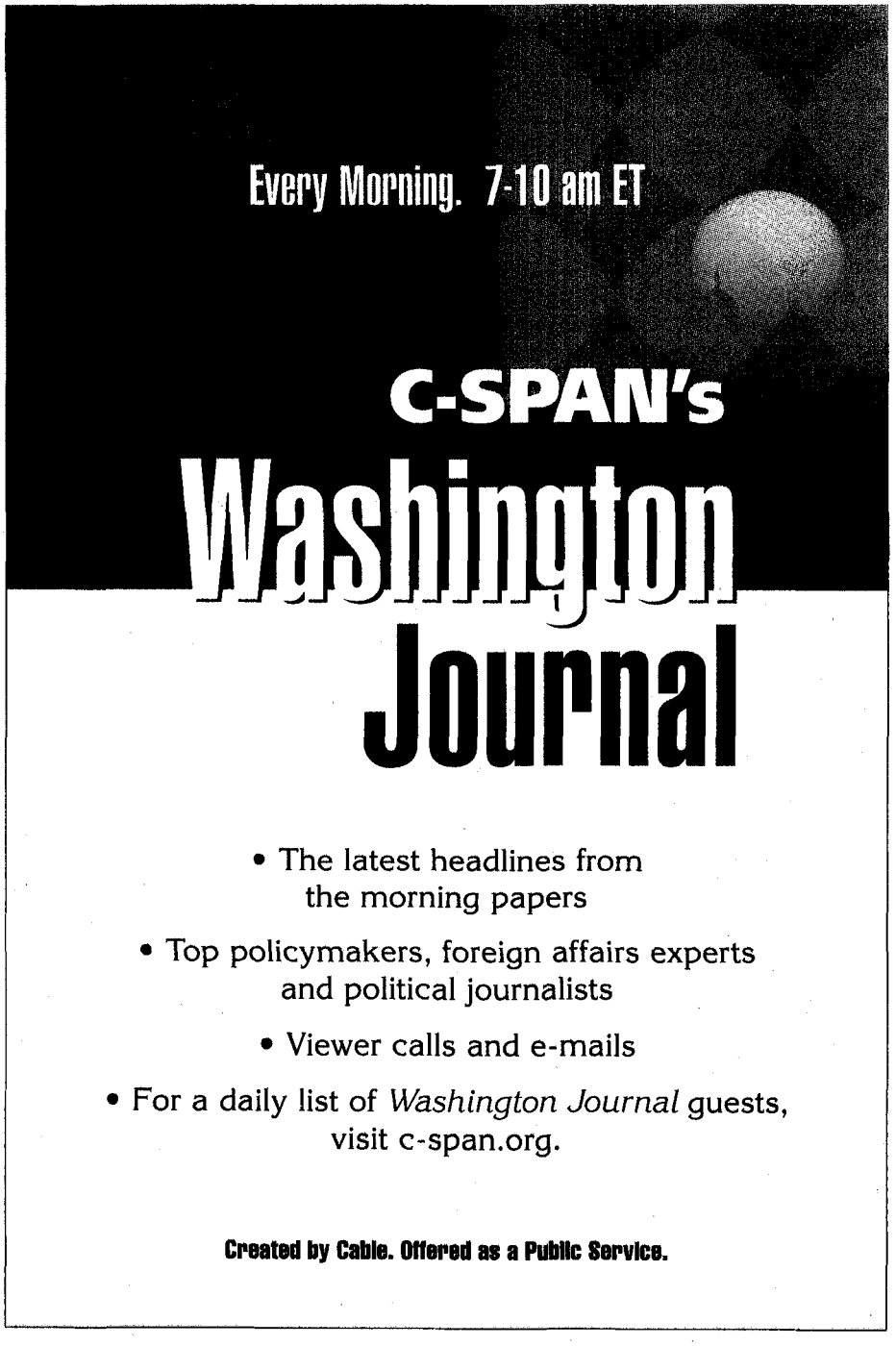
covered nearly as well as their sources and were sufficiently knowledgeable to place new information in context and make independent judgments about the truth of the matter and the likely consequences. They saw themselves as professionals with honor, and they were eager to uphold the unwritten standards that laid stress on basic integrity, accuracy, honesty and balanced judgment.

When he joined the AP in the late 1930s, there was little status attached to the reporter's trade. Barriers to entry were so low that anyone with a certain facility with the English language could become a reporter. At social gatherings, admitting that one was a reporter was roughly like saying one was a mortician. By the time Reston was the at peak of his powers, journalism had become a "profession" and journalists saw themselves as keepers of public morals. Young journalists coming to Washington in the 1960s aspired to be Scotty Reston. But by the onset of the 1970s, he was no longer the standard of excellence. Soon, the irreverent young reporters who exposed the Watergate cover-up, Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, became the models for young reporters everywhere. Reston's devotion to his adopted country, his respect for authority, his belief in the system, all made him support the presidency. There was also an element of self-delusion involved. He trusted his sources, apparently believing he was too important to be lied to. He attacked Woodward's book about the Supreme Court in 1979, which contained accounts of personal animosities among the Justices. "We are living in an age of destruction," he argued. "Criticism...is going too far and undermining the institutions we need the most."

It's no secret that journalism in America is undergoing a serious crisis. The quality of journalism has suffered. The old professional standards are in tatters or discarded entirely. With a few exceptions, most journalists seem to me to operate in an ethical vacuum, while our editors, corporate owners and some distinguished practitioners go through contortions to pretend that the decline of journalism is caused by the fierce competition brought on by round-the-clock cable television and the instant communications of the cyberworld. I suspect this is only partly true. The best papers still care about ethics and quality. The number of newspapers, however, has been steadily declining, and four out of every five are owned by large, homogenized chains whose primary concern is the bottom line. Reporters like myself, who have been in the business for a while, talk frequently these days about avoiding certain topics that would clash with the financial interests of their organizations.

A century ago, Theodore Roosevelt thought the main issue of his day was the economic power of corporations, which was threatening democracy and had to be balanced in the interests of the general public. Big money and big business are again the undisputed masters of government, and none of them want a vigorous press. The ever-growing influence of television offers readily available means to influence the people who define the news and decide what to cover: Big Business has advertising, and the government can control who gets access to newsmakers. The result is lap-dog reporting, pack journalism and infotainment laced by the theatrics of punditry. Once again, journalism is no longer a profession but rather a trade almost without entry barriers. Everybody is welcome, from Sean Hannity to George Stephanopoulos to Ann Coulter to Oliver North. Journalists are increasingly seen as television windbags or scribblers hired to advance nakedly right-wing agendas. The slide into tabloid mindlessness seems so relentless that, reading *Scotty*, one begins to understand the full degradation of public dialogue in America. ■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THEATER

Talkin' 'Bout My Generation

DAVID KAUFMAN

FIFTH OF JULY • MA RAINEY'S BLACK BOTTOM

The revival of a highly regarded play can either enhance or diminish its reputation. Consider the current productions of two very different works—by playwrights who share a surname—a couple of decades after their premieres. If Lanford Wilson's *Fifth of July* appears today to be a better play than memory allows, August Wilson's *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* has far less of an impact than it originally did. Such reassessments are surprising in each case: Having launched August Wilson's career, *Ma Rainey* had grown in stature, along with its playwright's reputation. *Fifth of July*, on the other hand, focused on 1960s radicals who reunite a decade later, and it seemed permanently wedded to the post-Watergate period of its debut.

After opening in 1978 at the Circle Rep Theater, *Fifth of July* transferred to Broadway two years later, with most of its cast intact. Its present run has just been extended at Off Broadway's Signature Theatre, which has devoted its current season to Lanford Wilson, including an eye-opening revival of his *Burn This* last fall.

Lanford Wilson has always had a rare knack for getting inside his character's skin and revealing his or her humanity naturally. In *Sympathetic Magic* (1997)—arguably his most ambitious, and certainly his most underrated, play—Wilson investigated cosmic concerns by assembling a couple of astronomers and an anthropologist with a sculptor and a priest, providing each with an individual voice.

Set in a sprawling Missouri farmhouse, *Fifth of July* brings together several generations of the Talley family, with a couple of visiting friends, on Independence Day, 1977. The house is presently occupied by Ken Talley, a Vietnam vet who lost his spirit along with his legs. In addition to Jed, his devoted lover, Ken's sister June is on hand with her precocious adolescent daughter, Shirley. The most senior Talley is their dotty Aunt Sally, who, when she isn't looking for her late husband's ashes, imparts sage wisdom.

Wilson's introduction of Gwen and John, a flamboyant couple visiting from Los Angeles, helps evoke, at times, a farce by Kaufman and Hart. A wealthy 33-year-old woman who inherited a copper mine, Gwen is attempting to become a rock star, and she travels with Weston, a perpetually stoned yet erudite composer. While nurturing her musical aspirations, Gwen's husband John also looks after her business affairs.

Though we quickly glean that John is actually the father of June's adolescent daughter, it takes somewhat longer to realize that Ken, June, Gwen and John all lived together a decade earlier, when they were students at Berkeley. It takes even longer still to understand that they had overlapping affairs with each other. The specific alignments are never completely spelled out, but they may have included some homosexual as well as incestuous couplings among the four players: It was the 1960s, after all.

By taking the nation's pulse in the aftermath of the Vietnam War, Wilson was trying to gauge what had happened to the idealism of the 1960s as well as to the once-ubiquitous feeling that our world was being permanently altered for the better. As Gwen looks back on their heady days of civil protest, she intimates that she was less than a committed rabble-rouser. When John refutes her flippant remarks by reminding Gwen that she "helped firebomb" her own company, she replies, "I was stoned. Who knew what we were doing? We were on TV, we were on the cover of *Time* magazine. It was a blast."

In sharp contrast with Gwen's having been something of a tag-along, June really believed in her former convictions. As she proudly tells her daughter, "You have no idea of the country we almost made for you. The fact that I think it's all a crock now does not take away from what we almost achieved."

What could easily have become formulaic in another playwright's hands is here graced by Wilson's subtle writing. As much as any of his plays, and perhaps more than most, *Fifth of July* justifies the tendency to compare Wilson to Chekhov. Like that great Russian playwright, Wilson achieves his exposition via circling insinuations that come to resemble utterly natural discourse. The characters inspire both laughter and pathos, as their yearnings and their disappointments (i.e., their stories) are relayed via Chekhovian digressions.

If the current production makes the play seem even better than it was the first time around, it may have a lot to do with the performance. Although Swoosie Kurtz won the Tony Award in 1981 for her dazzling star turn as the kooky Gwen, in retrospect, it appears that she may have hijacked the stage from the other actors in order to gain it. Today, Parker Posey presents a Gwen who is less of a caricature and more credible. Under Jo Bonney's meticulous direction, she also fits more comfortably into the fabric of the ensemble. Without meaning to slight anyone in the fine cast, honorable mentions are also deserved by Robert Sean Leonard for conveying the heartache beneath Ken's cynicism and by Pamela Payton-Wright for her endearing Sally.

Wilson, too, evidently fell in love with Sally. He was compelled to write two prequels to the Talley saga: *Talley's Folly* (which won a Pulitzer Prize) and *A Tale Told*, both occurring simultaneously, as it were, on July 4, 1944, at different sites on the Talleys' Missouri estate.

August Wilson's far more monumental and nearly completed cycle of ten plays—which document the African-American experience decade by decade during the twentieth century—began with *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*. (His ninth play in the cycle, *Gem of the Ocean*, will have its world premiere at Chicago's Goodman Theater in April.) Seeing *Ma Rainey* nearly twenty years later, one can't help recognizing it for what it is: an early work by an unseasoned playwright. The current revival at Broadway's Royale Theatre also underscores some problems common to Wilson's plays: While each features incandescent monologues and brilliantly realized scenes, they also rely on old-fashioned melodramatics, and few transcend their author's contrivances. (Two notable exceptions are *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* and *The Piano Lesson*.) This Wilson is a playwright whose architecture and artifice are usually showing.

Nominally considered to be the mother of the blues, Ma Rainey would have been 41 in 1927, when the play that bears her name is set. The plot is built around a re-

David Kaufman, who writes frequently about theater, is the author of the just-published Ridiculous! The Theatrical Life and Times of Charles Ludlam *(Applause).*

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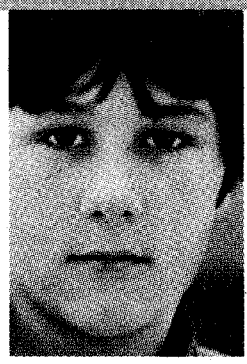

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cording session in a Chicago studio, and the drama centers on whether to use a jazzy new arrangement of the eponymous song, rather than the "jug band" style Rainey prefers. David Gallo's ultrarealistic setting places Rainey's agent and the head of the studio in an enclosed sound booth above the stage, perfectly capturing the work's central message about the oppression of blacks by whites.

As conceived by Wilson, Rainey is an imperious woman who exploits her success to wield what power she can over her handlers. "The white folks don't care at all about me," says Rainey about her cheapskate record producers. "All they want is my voice.... As soon as they get my voice down on them recording machines, then it's just like if I'd be some whore and they roll over and put their pants on. Ain't got no use for me then."

The shrewd Rainey also uses her authority to manipulate her band, and particularly the trumpet-playing Levee, who's created the new musical arrangements she rejects. Though the play's title might suggest otherwise, Levee emerges as its centrifugal force. We become acquainted with his evident volatility while the band is waiting for the delinquent Rainey to show up.

Levee views himself as a real artist, superior to the rest of the band. "If my daddy knowed I was gonna turn out like this he would've named me Gabriel." Levee has also written some songs, and frequently refers to his dream of having his own band.

With both her stuttering nephew and her gorgeous young lesbian lover in tow, Rainey arrives unconscionably late for the recording session. And then, as if the circumstances weren't already combustible enough, Levee overlooks his colleagues' advice and comes on to Rainey's lover.

As in most of his subsequent plays, Wilson overtly foreshadows the bloodshed to come. The violent climax of *Ma Rainey* ensues after Levee is fired by Ma and then thwarted by her producer—introducing what would become Wilson's recurring theme of displaced black rage. In the food-chain world the playwright customarily portrays, blacks are always on the bottom rung, where, inevitably, they are compelled to prey on one another.

As with the first production of *Ma Rainey*, the best thing about this revival is Charles S. Dutton's powerhouse portrayal of Levee, a part he originated in 1984. Whether ranting against a "white man's God" or pacing the rehearsal room like a caged animal, Dutton is riveting. One also rushes to applaud the three gifted actors who play the other band members with a natural camaraderie: Carl Gordon, Thomas Jefferson Byrd and Stephen McKinley Henderson. But in comparison with the imposing fierceness of Theresa Merritt's original Ma Rainey, Whoopi Goldberg doesn't seem comfortable with the character's towering ire: She delivers a small and awkward performance that reduces Rainey's wise remarks to clichés. "White folks don't understand about the blues," says Rainey. "They don't understand that's life's way of talking. You don't sing to feel better. You sing 'cause that's a way of understanding life." ■

FILMS

Dashboard Confessional

STUART KLAWANS

10 • UNDER THE SKIN OF THE CITY

A few years ago, when moviegoers in this country were just beginning to learn about Abbas Kiarostami, I heard a crowd of New Yorkers berate him for having put a snatch of Vivaldi onto a soundtrack. These audience members had paid for an Iranian experience, and they damn well wanted the music to go with with it. Kiarostami, puzzled by their complaint, blinked impatiently behind his tinted glasses. "But Vivaldi's music," he finally said, "is like the sun. It belongs to everybody."

In the conviction that Kiarostami, too, belongs to everyone, I will introduce his most recent film, *10*, by recalling a bit of New York City lore.

One night in 1950, the story goes, a hanger-on came into the Cedar Tavern and sat down at the bar beside Franz Kline. "I have just seen the worst show ever," the man announced happily. "Barnett Newman, at Betty Parsons. Nothing's there—nothing at all!"

"The gallery's empty?" Kline asked.

"There's one painting, and it's nothing."

"How about that?" Kline mused. "Barney's showing just one painting."

"I mean, there's a bunch of paintings, but they're all the same. Just one color."

"All the paintings are the same color?"

"No, this one is red, that one is blue, the other——"

"Ah," Kline said. "Solid colors."

"Yes, except for this ridiculous stripe."

"A stripe, too? What kind of stripe?"

"Just the same damn stripe everywhere. In the middle, over to one side, over to the other."

"So it moves, this stripe. Just one to a painting."

"One, two. Who cares? All Newman did was make stripes, straight up and down."

"Same height every time, I guess."

"Well, no. They run top to bottom, and the paintings are different sizes."

Kline sipped his beer. "Different sizes, different colors, different places where the stripes run? I dunno," he said. "Sounds pretty complicated to me."

Which is to say that Kiarostami's *10* is nothing—absolutely nothing, except for scenes of an unnamed woman (played by Mania Akbari) driving around Teheran in a car. She makes ten trips in the course of the film, each time conversing with a single passenger. Sometimes the camera is fixed on her, sometimes on the passenger; and sometimes Kiarostami cuts back and forth between the two. The episodes vary in length; the routes take the car speeding along highways or nosing through congested streets; the time shifts between day and night. Some of the passengers ride only once; others show up in multiple episodes. Costumes change. Lines of dialogue echo between one segment and another. It's pretty complicated.

And like a Barnett Newman canvas, it's also supersaturated with meaning. Consider the first episode, which introduces the driver's son: a round-faced, jug-eared boy on the verge of puberty, with bowl-cut hair, a Western logo T-shirt and the last traces of a childhood lisp. No sooner has he pitched himself into the passenger seat than he and his mother are yelling. He hates her for having divorced and remarried; he hates his stepfather; he hates the lie his mother told, when she said his father was a drug addict.

But she had to lie, the mother screams back. It was the only way to get a divorce. "A woman has no rights in this society! I was like a zombie!"

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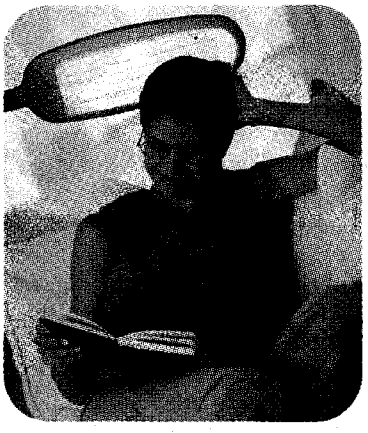

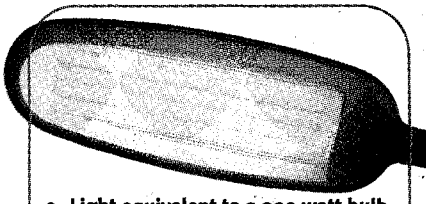

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And so, using the most rudimentary of techniques to record a seemingly unscripted exchange, Kiarostami announces the theme of *10*, at the highest decibel level. This woman demands her freedom and will go on demanding it, even if the effort makes her sound harsh, even if (as often happens in unscripted exchanges) the effect is not entirely happy.

The boy keeps covering his ears, twisting in his seat and nearly whimpering as he cries, "Don't shout!" And because he's just a boy, because he still lisps, because the camera for the first dozen minutes shows only him, his plea temporarily outweighs her self-justification. We begin to feel sympathy for the driver—and get a fresh charge of meaning—only at the end of this first episode, when Kiarostami at last cuts to her. That voice on the soundtrack, so self-righteous and insistent, turns out not to have come from a harpy. It belongs to a strikingly elegant young woman, done up in lipstick, chic sunglasses and the loosest white headscarf the law will allow.

Over the course of the next episodes, Kiarostami will contrast this woman with her sister (a more drab and nervous type), a sobbing friend who has been dumped by her husband, a young acquaintance who is uncertain of her boyfriend and is now seeking religious faith. Though wonderfully dense in their particularities, these characters are also mirrors of the driver, who might have become like any of them. At the mysterious emotional core of *10*, though, are back-to-back encounters with two passengers who are more remote as possible selves, since they differ markedly from the driver in age and social station. These central characters, who remain all but unseen, are an elderly woman who talks of prayers and pilgrimages and overflowingly fecund families, and a prostitute.

About the elderly woman, I need say only that the driver listens to her with a mixture of curiosity and irony. A chic young modern woman cannot adopt such untutored piety, but neither does she dismiss it (as becomes evident during later rides).

The prostitute makes a far trickier passenger. It's not just that she gives voice to attitudes that are meant to shock. (She laughingly dismisses the difference between streetwalkers and married women, saying, "We're the wholesalers, you're the retailers.") What makes the prostitute so compelling is that she *only* gives voice. It's nighttime when the driver picks her up; the scene outside the car window is dark except for the passing streetlamps and shop windows, and the driver's face flashes in and out of view. The prostitute cannot be seen at all—which makes her mocking, drawling speech seem as intimate as if it came from inside the driver's head. What was the driver thinking, anyway, when she picked up this woman? Why won't she stop now and let her out, as the prostitute keeps requesting?

Here, in what is literally the murkiest passage of *10*, Kiarostami opens up desires that are far more unruly than the demand for equal rights before the law. "Pretend I'm a man," the driver says at one point, ostensibly to encourage conversation—to which the prostitute raucously shoots back, "I've never worked that field!" The reverberations of that line ring through later episodes—and so, too, do some of the prostitute's phrases, which the driver will repeat, though without the corrosive cynicism.

As even this incomplete sketch might hint, Kiarostami builds up a pattern in *10*—a mosaic, you might say, in which the relationships between the parts seem to change each time you blink. It's a mosaic on the subject of freedom—and the most astonishing thing about it, perhaps, is that Kiarostami achieved it by giving up control of the movie.

In an exceptional feat of look-Ma-no-hands filmmaking, Kiarostami fixed digital video cameras to the dashboard of the car, turned them on and then stood at the curb as his set and actors drove away. He was absent during the shooting of every scene in *10*; he probably didn't even know exactly where Akbari would drive. Of course, he must have prepared the performers, and he chose which takes to use afterward; but whatever you see on the screen truly happened before the camera, as it used to happen in the old actualities footage that was cinema at its most basic.

You might even say that *10* is so basic, so radical, that it brings you back to the biomechanics of cinema. Because Kiarostami's camera is stationary within a traveling car, the image remains still and yet moves. This is, of course, the nature of film: A succession of photographs blurs into apparent motion. The blur is subjective, illusory, directionless—and in *10*, it pulses with the longings of women in a real time and place.

What emerges from this minimalist, form-obsessed movie, as if from the body of cinema itself? At its climax, the film contrives to show you what cannot be shown in today's Iran: the image of a bare-headed woman. That a ruse is involved—a ruse that needn't be explained in this

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review—should come as no surprise to anyone who has followed Kiarostami's career. Once again, the director (and nondirector) has lied with beguiling simplicity, and so called up the complicated truth.

While *10* enjoys its US theatrical run, kicking off March 5–18 at Film Forum in New York, moviegoers will have the chance to see another Iranian feature as well, this one written and directed by one of the country's leading female filmmakers, Rakhshan Bani-Etemad. Titled *Under the Skin of the City*, the picture takes us from the thin, crystalline air atop Mount Kiarostami back to the smoggy lowlands of family melodrama, where many audiences find it easier to breathe.

Here is the story of Tuba (Golab Adineh), a tough-minded, middle-aged woman who works in a Teheran textile factory, and her troubled children: Abbas (Mohammad Reza Foroutan), the young man who schemes to immigrate to Japan and make money; Hamideh (Homeira Riazi), the married daughter who flees her abusive husband; Mahboubeh (Baran Kowsari), the teenage daughter who just wants a little fun, and suffers for it; and Ali (Ebraheem Sheibani), the college-age son, whose idealism gets him into political brawls and puts his brother Abbas into a very deep jam.

This set of characters, as conventional as you will find in any movie about the urban working class, is portrayed conventionally—and very well—by a cast of professional actors. In other words, *Under the Skin of the City* is a normal movie—which in an Iranian context makes it rather unusual. Bani-Etemad resorts to no narrative dodges, no circumlocutions, no sleights of hand in which nonprofessionals play at being themselves. Like her earlier features (unreleased to date in the United States), *Under the Skin of the City* provides solid, meat-and-potatoes storytelling—even though the Ministry of Guidance, which rejected several versions of the script, would apparently have preferred gruel.

What do Iranian audiences prefer? According to Bani-Etemad, *Under the Skin of the City* was Iran's top-grossing film in 2001, with more than 1.2 million admissions. I thought of those figures during the picture's only "typical" Iranian moment, when a film crew suddenly broke the frame by trying to interview Tuba. "Who do you show these movies to?" she demanded, in a rage. Many skeptics have asked that same question about the work of Kiarostami, Makhmalbaf, Panahi. Bani-Etemad can claim the satisfaction of having asked, and then being able to give a good answer. ■

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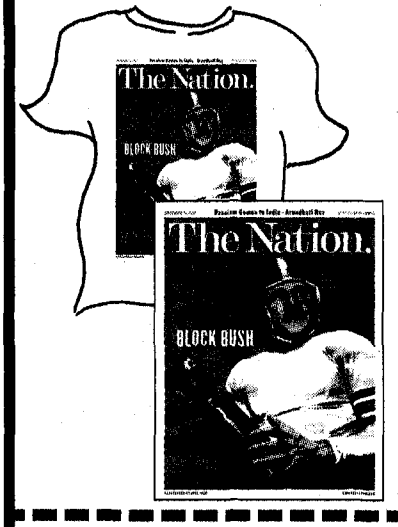

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LINCOLN KIRSTEIN: I'M PREPARING THE AUTHORIZED biography of Lincoln Kirstein for the Kirstein Estate and Alfred Knopf, Inc. I'm interested in locating people who knew him or had correspondence with him. Confidentiality assured. Martin Duberman: e-mail martinduberman@aol.com; mail 475 W. 22 St. #2, New York, NY 10011.

F.O. MATTHIESSEN (1902–50). Biographer of the Harvard literary scholar would appreciate hearing from his former friends, colleagues and students. Please contact Professor Jay Grossman by e-mail at J-Grossman@northwestern.edu, or write c/o American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 136 Irving St., Cambridge, MA 02138.

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PUZZLE NO. 2885

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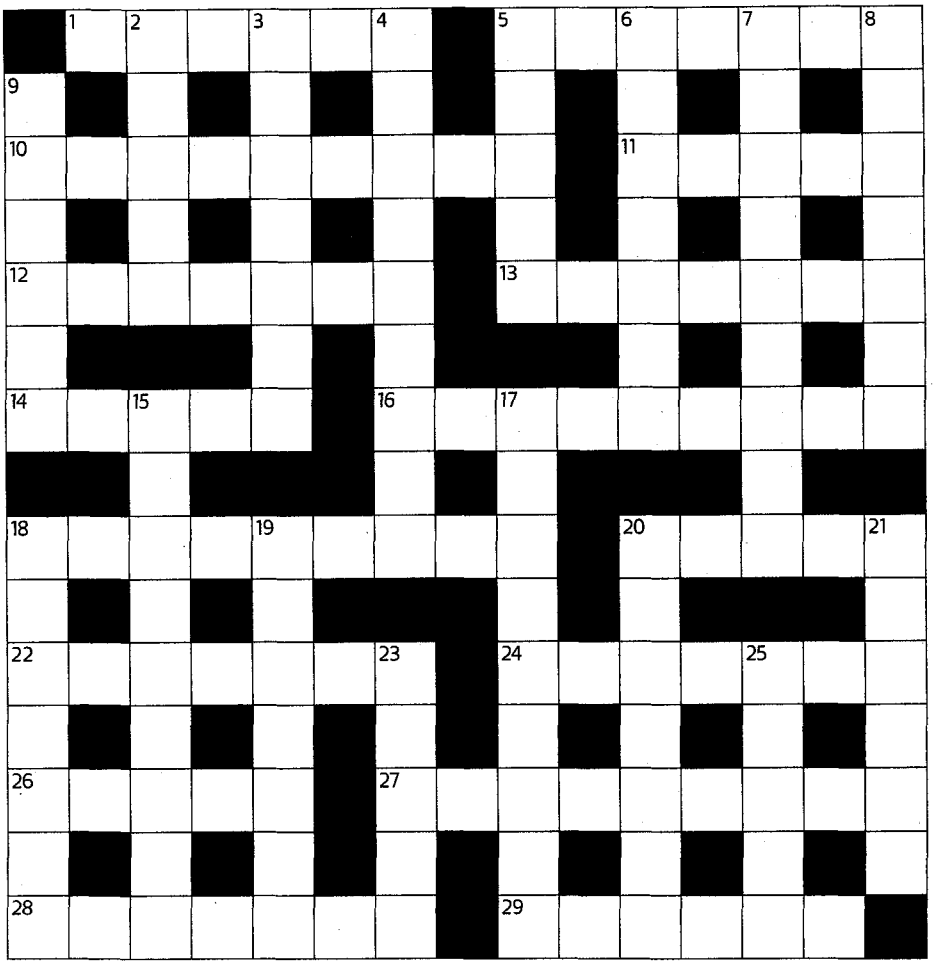

ACROSS

1 and **5** Some bread given to the British queen on what may be holding drink. (One has ups and downs with it.) (6,7)

10 Turns the hose on a tree, as a way to guarantee complete wetness. (5-4)

11 See 2 down

12 Go ahead—it's the 11 definition! (7)

13 Slang for where you don't want to be thrown, as you might be in closing the door. (7)

14 See 23 down

16 Evidently none of the crew is engaged, but the devil "will find work for them." (4,5)

18 Even missing the boat, this would still be flowering. (2,7)

20 Sock a man who could have prophesied what was coming. (5)

22 Careless and useless, both do—going on and on! (7)

24 A bum editor, in short, is next to this. (7)

26 Met me somehow with an armchair for the worker. (5)

27 Where a pitcher is not supposed to pour anything, though ready, willing and able to be this. (2,3,4)

28 and **29** When the top brass refuse to work? (7,6)

DOWN

2, 11 across and **25** down One hopes the train you are waiting for will be headed in the proper direction. (2,3,5,5)

3 Part of a regular gesture, and certainly not of the smallest variety. (7)

4 About coming up in untested players, you could really get the bird in such places! (9)

5 and **21** The good things in life covered by Maugham. (5,3,3)

6 Sailor stepping on a pest? Make the contents run free! (7)

7 Ad in and hides some get-up, with the accepted type of people tearing up the street shortly. (9)

8 Many happy ones are not the type one has to file annually. (7)

9 Nicks, as the British say, but when the driver does it on the side, it's bad! (6)

15 One might be expected to look out for your interests. (The sound of meditation blooms soon, my fellow!) (9)

17 Roasts what may be roasted like any group coming up. (9)

18 Ill-met when afloat, but it will give you a tip! (7)

19 Given a barely seeable picture, with a sort of rat nose. (3-4)

20 Disdain is "high French" at the old, old place. (7)

21 See 5 down

23 and **14** across One who takes the fun out of the party also lets the wine go bad! (10)

PUZZLED? No more cross words. If you don't see why "Lures" are "Ground Rules" send for those of Mr. Lewis to: Puzzled, *The Nation*, 33 Irving Place, New York, NY 10003, or access our website at www.thenation.com/crossword.

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G	E	N	T	I	L	E	■	D	I	P	T	E	R	A
G	■	A	■	P	■	T	■	I	■	S	■	L	■	T
Y	E	S	■	W	E	H	A	V	E	■	T	A	K	E
■	■	T	■	R	■	Y	■	E	■	A	■	M	■	F
N	E	A	R	E	A	S	T	■	W	I	N	B	Y	A
O	■	■	■	C	■	T	■	B	■	D	■	■	■	I
B	R	E	A	K	S	■	L	A	V	E	N	D	E	R
A	■	N	■	S	■	M	■	D	■	D	■	R	■	■
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N	I	A	G	A	R	A	■	S	C	A	L	P	E	L
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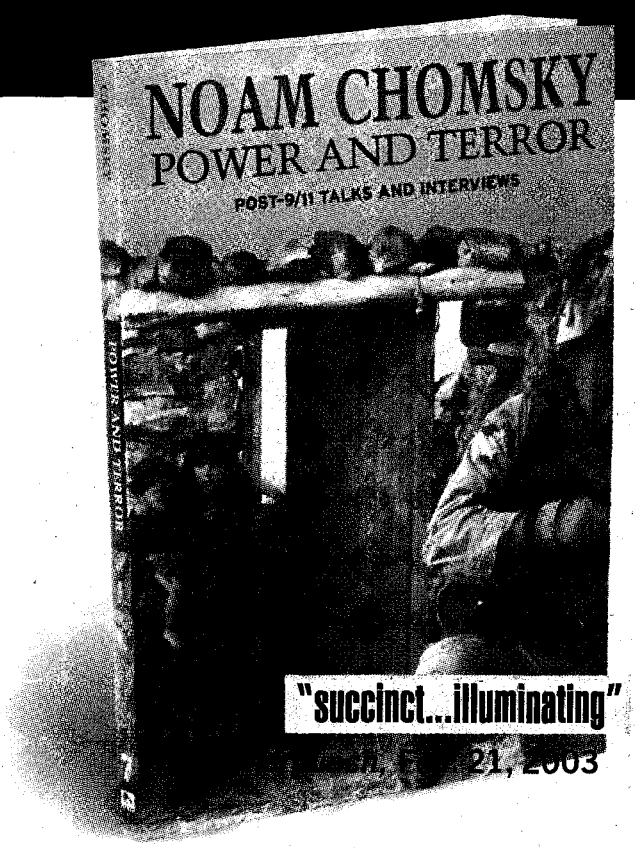
speak truth to power?

Q: You've said that we as citizens should not speak truth to power but, instead, to people. Shouldn't we do both? Could you speak more on this subject?



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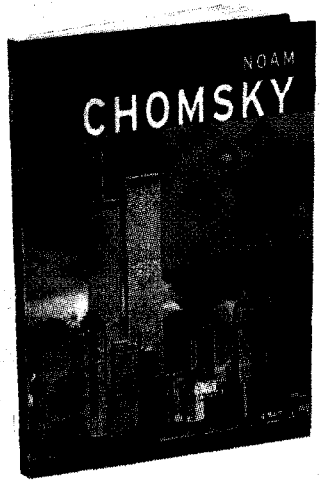
CHOMSKY: ...First of all, power already knows the truth. They don't need to hear it from us. Secondly, it's a waste of time. Furthermore, it's the wrong audience. You have to speak truth to the people who will dismantle and overthrow and constrain power. I don't like the phrase "speak truth to." We don't know the truth. At least I don't.

We should join with the kind of people who are willing to commit themselves to overthrow power, and listen to them. They often know a lot more than we do. And join with them to carry out the right kinds of activities. Should you also speak truth to power? If you feel like it, but I don't see a lot of point. I'm not interested in telling the people around Bush what they already know.

—from *Power and Terror*



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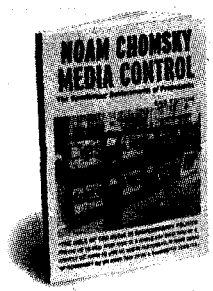

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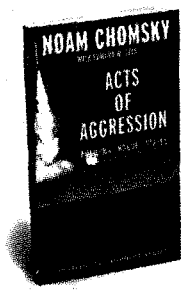

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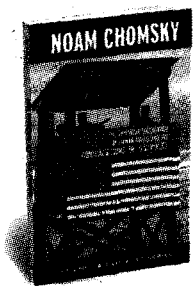

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